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# Adventure

Captain Dingle
W. C. Tuttle
Bill Adams
Gordon Young
F. St. Mars
Lloyd Kohler
Kenneth Gilbert
Santie Sabalala
Boyd Fleming

☆

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*


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HIGH above the Kentucky mountains, *Lieutenant Hemingway* looks down from his airplane to watch a moonshiner's duel. Then his engine begins to miss. And his cargo is sulfuric acid. "THERE AND BACK," a complete novelette by Thomson Burtis, in the next issue.

*Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.*

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**Don't forget the new dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

Adventure
January 20th 1922
Vol. XXXII
No. 5

# Tides of Hate

by Captain Dingle

a complete Novel

*Author of "Mickey's Marquis," "Doc," etc.*

A THOUSAND green parrots chattered in the nodding palms of Aves Island; half a thousand men, drunk with black rum far beyond the limit of hilarity, into the mood which breeds black mischief, cursed parrots and palms impartially, cursed the golden fruit of orange and lime-trees, cursed the silver sands and the blue Caribbean, with a whole-souled heartiness born of the hurricane barely past, which had strewn stout pirate ships along the harbor shores.

Left leaderless when John Cook departed to seek Swan, his crony, the fierce brotherhood of Aves found themselves powerless to cope with misfortune when the storm took them in the midst of a red orgy. And now, when the gale was all but spent, and but half a dozen craft of many different rigs were left them intact, the strong spirit which should have aroused them to strenuous effort was lacking. Rum-casks were broached where smithy fires should have been lighted; men who should have bawled the windlass song at salving-tackles howled lurid obscenities into the blue skies in drunken ribaldry.

"Guzzling swine!"

The epithet came with the crisp staccato of a pistol-shot from among the bundled root stems of an organ-palm. The roaring ruffians at the nearest rum-cask scowled toward the spot, and grimy paws sought cutlas-hilts.

"Swine! Swine!" screamed a great cockatoo with vast rustling of wings, and the pirates' anger turned to mirth.

" 'Tis the 'Singing Schoolmaster' with his parrot!" they roared. "Fetch 'em. Make 'em sing!"

Two staggering mulattos crashed into the thicket out of which the palms sprang, and presently the sounds of high-pitched protest were heard, accompanied by the sharper sounds of smart blows delivered with a cane. Cries of mock fear resounded in the gruff voices of the drunken messengers, and soon the crashing thicket yielded up a knot of struggling bodies, above which squawked and rustled a red-crested cockatoo bedraggled of feather but belligerent of eye.

"Ho, my bold bookworm!" The hail was bellowed forth from the waiting gang about the great cask. "A song from you, lad, with a parrot chorus. Tune yer pipes, lad. Here. Wet yer dry whistle."

A pirate held out a silver goblet holding a pint of pungent rum. The captive thrust it aside with such a gesture of disgust as to

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spill most of the liquor in the sand; and as if in entire sympathy with his distaste for the company he was forced into, the cockatoo flapped his wings in the face of the cupbearer and screamed raucously. Another man seized the bird in a horny fist invulnerable to the fearsome hooked beak that pecked at it.

"Here, Mat, give the surly bird a draft o' singing juice," he cried, and forced open the screaming bird's beak.

With a howl of boozy mirth they poured rum down the bird's gullet, then set it on the ground and waited, while the owner of the misused bird struck resounding but ineffective blows impartially upon all with a futile bamboo staff.

"Heathens!" cried he whom they called the Schoolmaster. "Heathen swine! Does neither shame nor pity dwell in you? To treat a poor bird——"

"Squawk!" screamed the parrot with its wings dragging in the sand, its crest awry, and its head held sidewise ludicrously. "Squawk! Holla, holla! There's blood on the moon! Ha, ha, ha-a-a-ah!"

Then, while the roaring tipplers surged and rocked with appreciative merriment and his master was hurled roughly away so that he was powerless to interfere, the bird staggered in a narrow circle with rolling gait and screeched a doggerel stave:

> "The Rover hides in Aves when he runs.
> Rum and wenches there he braves—not guns!
> Boldly will he boast of fight, when the foeman's not in sight,
> But from a man-o'-war, how he runs!"

The bedraggled cockatoo concluded his amazingly lucid song with a prolonged screech which startled his wild, free fellows in the palmettos; then he deliberately buried his beak in the warm earth, walked three times around it dragging his wings noisily, and at last toppled over and lay quiet in complete stupor. His tormentors greeted this last act with boisterous mirth; all except two, older, fiercer-looking men than the rest, who scowled down at the parrot and from it to its master standing alone where they had thrust him.

He met their black scowls with a bland, innocent gaze, in keeping with the character they had given him of a harmless, all but imbecile creature with a man's body and an angel's voice, possessing neither feelings nor wit.

"The bird has more wit than his master," growled one with savage emphasis.

"A bird learns no more than his teacher knows," retorted the other as savagely. "Yonder fowl's teacher, whoever he was, knows a plaguy sight too much. Hullo! You Schoolmaster chap, come here!"

The Schoolmaster started to obey. Suddenly he stopped, his gaze turned toward the settlement beyond the thicket of organ-palms; and from that moment he seemed oblivious to the pirates and their commands. Light footsteps sounded in the crisp grasses and fallen palm-fronds, and he caught sight of color—vivid color such as men never wore, be they swaggering pirate blades or dandies of the courts. The two pirates leaped toward him together, while their mates, less bold perhaps, slunk away to their barbecue.

"I hailed you," one reminded him, and with the reminder dealt him a blow which sent him reeling against the other ruffian.

"I hailed ye, too," that worthy rejoined, and straightened the victim with another heavy thump. "Who taught yonder parrot? Hey? Sing out, lad."

THE Schoolmaster was not a small man. He stood fully as tall as any man on Aves, and his frame seemed built as strongly. His wrists were stout, and hair grew on them as on his fingers, his face was tanned and ruddy, its lines were strong-hewn and of no weakling type. Yet he submitted to the mishandling like a sheep, or at least so it seemed.

Just once, when a blow split his lips and drew blood, did a smoldering devil leap to life in his steady, gray eyes; it was quelled in an instant, and again he was the harmless, innocent lack-wit, the singing prisoner of the pirates' settlement. But while that flash lived, some of the fire that caused it must have sped his hands also, for his two assailants found themselves flung off with a force that brought them crashing against the palm-trunks and left fiery specks dancing before their eyes. Before suspicion could more than sprout in their woozy brains, a ringing voice, clear and musical as a bell, halted their sport, and between them and their victim stepped a gorgeous creature of flamboyant handsomeness.

"Have done, Doggett! Back, Rando!" the woman cried sharply, and a hand on each broad chest thrust them aside.

The pirates stared at her in red anger. Though both men fell back before her their brutalized faces revealed very different emotions regarding her. The scowling rascal called Doggett leaned forward menacingly, and rasped:

"Ye're in plaguy bad company to show such officiousness, Mistress Nell Clark! I would as lief clap steel to a woman as a man if that woman can not keep her place in a man's company. You're but a pirate yourself. You should know us better."

The woman glared back at him fearlessly, and a sharp retort was upon her lips. But Rando, the other bully, uttered an evil laugh, stepped forward suddenly and swept the woman into a fierce, bear-like embrace, forcing her head back with the pressure of his bristly face.

"Sweet Nell," he laughed, kissing her roughly, "a pretty wench should choose softer amusements than coming between men and their affairs. If a pirate you must be, leave your pirating for the sea, lass, and play the merry wench ashore. Come, give us a buss!"

Nell Clark had not earned her title of female pirate without good cause. She was able to care for herself in any company, and most men knew it. It was time Rando discovered it now.

With the lithe strength of a tigress she twisted herself free, sprang back, and, returning forward with bewildering speed, a swinging blow of her clenched fist felled Rando to the ground.

"There, swine!" she cried furiously. "Will you lay your filthy paws on a woman again?"

Rando leaped to his feet cursing venomously, and in his hand a knife gleamed. Blind to all but vengeance for that humiliating blow, he stumbled toward the woman, with knife poised for a deadly thrust. Nell Clark laughed in his face. With a motion so swift that her dagger looked like a flashing sunbeam she glided within his arm reach and struck as a viper strikes; and Rando sank again to the green earth, his blood reddening the golden sand beneath the vivid grass.

"Curse you! You've killed him! Nell!" rasped Doggett hoarsely.

"Aye, I truly hope so," the woman flashed back. "'Twill serve to show you and all such cattle that neither a prisoner nor a woman is game for your kind. But see to him. Maybe he'll live to taste steel again. And you, Schoolmaster they call you, come with me, sir. I will make amends for this scurvy treatment now, and see that it is punished when I can get to the ears of John Cook."

The Schoolmaster picked up his stupefied parrot, set it on his shoulder and supported it with one hand, then turned to the woman with a whimsical smile.

"It would seem that punishment did not wait upon John Cook," he said. "The bully was grassed in right good pirate fashion, Nell."

The woman glanced sharply into his face, and upon her own not unhandsome features descended a hard, masculine expression which revealed the fierce nature that underlay the feminine exterior, and made clear the reason why Nell Clark stood high in the list of female buccaneers. She flashed her glance around, saw that they were alone in the pleasant palmetto grove, and retorted:

"Who should know that better than Captain Davies?"

A bitter laugh escaped her when he started slightly at the name. But the man remained cool and apparently untouched by her shot. She shrugged her strong shoulders, gave back glance for glance with him and insisted:

"You are too great a fish in our pond to hide under that guise of the harmless halfwit, Davies. You'll see when Cook and his veterans come in. Meanwhile be satisfied that Nell Clark knows you. Now come to my hut and tell me the reason for this masquerade."

The Schoolmaster laughed gently, and with a boldness not to be expected of a man such as he appeared to be, after witnessing such an encounter as that by which Rando tasted steel, he pinched Nell's arm indulgently, as a big brother might tease a growing sister.

"Neither admitting nor denying, Nell o' the stout heart; let us leave the question for the moment. 'Twill busy you and all the friends you've made, to quell what you've started in my defense. Hark!"

His hand upraised, he forced attention, and the woman stood in tense silence. From the scene of the rum-cask carouse, coming like muted music through organ-palm and palmetto, rose the reverberating murmur, growing to a roar, of a mob in angry motion, and the sound grew swiftly.

## II

THE woman glanced around her, and a momentary shiver seemed to suggest that even her boldness failed to reassure her entirely in the presence of that imminent menace. The grove where she and the Schoolmaster stood listening was empty of any but themselves; through the polished stems of palms, and the broad leaves of wild bananas, the pirate settlement's dazzling walls of coral and shell-lime peeped at no great distance, and just beyond twinkled the blue Caribbean, dotted sparsely with small craft at anchor, in various degrees of dismantlement.

But not a man was to be seen either at the work that shouted for action or at the village; every idle dog of a freebooter had cast aside all ties of duty in the absence of a strong leader and joined in the noisy barbecue now vomiting its roysterers in threatening search for vengeance in stricken Rando's behalf.

"Let us make haste to such cover as may be," the Schoolmaster urged, taking Nell's arm and starting forward.

His own face was grave, far graver than at any moment during his own recent baiting, unless it had been in that fleeting moment when he was hurt by a blow and forgot himself so far as almost to retaliate in kind. But some of the steely devil that had danced in his eyes then, lurked in them now, and his expression of harmless softness was sharply accentuated because of the two grim lines at his lip-corners.

"Can you give me weapons? We will give them a merry jig for a while, let what will happen after."

"Not even Edward Davies can stand off an army," Nell retorted passionately. "If John Cook—the laggard!—would but show his topsails above the horizon, he might yet——"

"He'll get here to find our bones, unless you make haste to arm us," the Schoolmaster rejoined savagely, at length out of patience.

The roaring mob were in sight, the leaders waving naked cutlases and bawling oaths aimed at the problematical immortal souls of Nell Clark and the singing Schoolmaster. The bedraggled parrot sat on his master's shoulder regarding the coming enemy with a red and disapproving eye.

"There's blood on the moo-oo-on, cra-w-awk!" the wretched bird squawked, and the woman laughed, the nervous tension broken.

"Come!" she cried, and ran swiftly to the seaward edge of the village.

"Here! In with you! 'Tis the armory and magazine. If they can smoke us out of here we may well leave the bones to Cook."

The heavy oaken door, made from the timbers of stout ships, clashed shut behind them, leaving them in darkness which was speedily filled by the clamor that instantly attacked the barrier. Nell Clark moved in the black gloom as if her eyes were possessed of the virtue of a cat's, and presently the Schoolmaster, who had forced a small peep-hole in a boarded window, felt the touch of a cold steel musket-barrel in his hand and heard her voice at his ear.

"Here! I've loaded it. Shoot Doggett first, and the rest will think twice before persisting after me. I have a half-hundred muskets at hand, and will load as you fire."

"One-piece shooting won't stand 'em off, Nell," Davies retorted, aiming at Doggett, however, through his peep-hole.

He fired, and squinted hard through the smoke to watch the result. The ball ripped past the pirate's ear, tearing the skin, but doing him small harm. It served to infuriate him, and his hoarse voice boomed forth:

"Tear the place down, lads! Ye've been swayed by the minx long enough. Ye're man's men, ain't ye? Then come on!"

Davies fired again, three times in quick order, and saw a man fall, another stop short with one arm clutched tightly in his other hand, and the third ball go astray. He flung down the muskets with a curse, thrusting aside the fresh ones Nell put to his hand.

"Devil seize such popguns!" he cried. "Have ye no good cutlas, nor any pistols? Give me a sharp blade and a brace of short blunderbuss hand-arms, and I'll open the door and put the fear o' the devil into the mob."

"You're but a poor shot with a musket," muttered Nell. "I have heard that your blade is a match for any three. But how long can it fight against that mob outside? And when you're down, shall I stay here like a sheep?

"Take the muskets, I say. Shoot—shoot—and still shoot, hit or miss, until I make my own invention ready."

"Give me a fistful of bullets, then. I'll

turn ball into grape if I must work such infernally useless tools."

He put a double handful of bullets into each musket on top of the proper charge; then with two muskets thrust forward together he pulled both triggers at once, staggered back under the terrific recoil and peered out with an eager smile on his blackened face.

A lane seemed to have been mowed through the press immediately outside the window. Bodies lay still or moved grotesquely on the ground; the air was filled with moans and oaths. But these came only from the injured; over the rest of the crowd a ghastly hush had fallen succeeding the crashing roar of that twin discharge.

"That's the medicine, Nell!" Davies laughed, dropping his guns and reaching out for others. "That's set 'em to thinking."

"Yes, for a moment," she replied, grimly at work upon some other device not yet to be discerned in the darkness. "Listen!"

THE outside air was suddenly murmurous with growing sound, the sound of men coming out of spell-bound silence and giving tongue to aroused murderous passion. Doggett's voice was to be heard, but faintly, as if he, though sorely wounded, still directed the attack from shelter. And another, ferocious, insistent voice joined in also from a distance, entreating the fiends of —— to put a vim into the tardy pirates. The voice came from a crawling, cursing pirate, red-bandaged and sorely hurt, dragging himself along the sand with the strength of tremendous hate.

"Shall a pair o' half-dead men show ye how to tear the pigeons out and flay 'em?" it roared; and Nell crept close to Davies with a little shuddering cry.

"It's Rando!"

"Rando, hey?" was the rejoinder. "He wants another taste of the steel, Nell. Here, let me out."

"Stay! I am all but ready. Shoot again, another double salvo. Just once more, and then I'll show you a trick o' mine."

The Schoolmaster loaded again and fired. Then the woman peered out beside him, noted the lesser destruction following the shot because of the scattering of the foe, and swiftly ran to the opposite side of the hut and dug out another spy-hole with her dagger. In a moment she was back and, taking his hand, guided it down to the invention she had completed.

"There!" she whispered tensely. "Strike a light, Davies. Touch a light to this fuse, and when I unbar the door, do you rush out, turn the angle, and roll this cask o' powder into the thick of the curs. Medicine? Aye, we'll physic 'em!"

She slipped flint and steel into his hand, and silently lifted the bar of the door, holding the socket end in place with hand pressure until the fuse was lighted. Tiny sparks flew in what would have been perilous proximity to stored powder-kegs at any other time; but now both ignored every spark save that which at last fell upon the tinder at the fuse's end. The Schoolmaster blew gently upon the smoldering rag until the fuse, which was stuck into the head of the keg, began to splutter. Then he stood upright, the keg gripped fast in both hands.

"Now!" he whispered.

The door swung wide, leaving the opening fair and free before the pirates could realize the change. Then, while yet they stood in uncertainty, afraid of some trap, missing the counsel of Rando and Doggett, both occupied for the moment upon each other's hurts, the tall form of the Schoolmaster rushed out, trundling his infernal cask, and paused at the corner.

For a mere breath he paused, twisted the cask, and sent it flying into the midst of the mob with a powerful kick of the foot. Then like a rabbit he turned and regained the hut, slamming fast the door in the faces of a dozen slow-witted fellows.

He found Nell at the window crack, and as he joined her, breathing a little harder from his haste, he became aware that she also was breathing agitatedly. He pinched her arm reassuringly.

"Don't!" she panted fiercely. "Look out! Down with you! On the ground, Davies!"

She pulled him down, but not before he had snatched a look through the window and seen a hardy ruffian some twenty feet distant stop the cask, turn it about and start it back toward the hut. Then he felt the earth rock, and the hut was filled with dust and a cataclysmic roar which seemed to burst his ear-drums. A heavy body struck the door with a crash, then darkness covered the apertures at door and window, the smell of gunpowder filled the hut, and

the Schoolmaster lay where he had fallen, groping with his hands, fearful of the next moment which must surely bring the explosion of the powder in the store.

A hand fell upon his face—a wet hand; and Nell Clark's voice laughed, unafraid though a trifle shaky.

"Your face feels like a living man's face, Schoolmaster, yet the smell is that of ——! Art living, or dead?"

"If you live, then I suppose I am living too," he replied with a laugh little less shaky than her own. "Yet I too thought I smelled the brimstone of Tophet. 'Twas a good jest the rogue turned on us. I'd like to shake him by the flipper, whoever he is."

"Better shake such as he by the throat," she retorted. "But see what is outside. Such a blast must surely have left its mark, since it has passed over us, and missed—But, how's this? The hut leans crazily."

"It does. That's one thing the blast did. Let me look."

The window was wedged tightly by the leaning cornerwise of the hut, but a good-sized splinter was gone, and through it could be seen the outside, still dark with settling dust, dispersing smoke and flying débris. An enormous hole yawned at the hut's corner where Davies peered forth, the hut was settling still deeper into it, and above the edge of the hole, which was roof high, frowned scores of bleeding, malignant faces.

"Starve out the rats," shrieked Rando, rendered doubly hideous now by the gunpowder streaks down his pallid face and by a matted patch of bloody hair drooping over one eye. Doggett raised his grimly battered head above the rim of the crater and vetoed the suggestion fiercely.

"Starve 'em?" he jeered. "Will they starve in three days, or six? John Cook will be here surely before they starve to death; then how do we fare? The pigeons will fly free, and we shall taste the captain's bitter vengeance.

"No! Gather fagots. Roll 'em down upon the hut from here. Set fire to the pile, my bold lads, and we'll lay back in yonder grove and watch the fireworks over our beef and rum. And who shall tell John Cook that the hut was burned by other than mishap, or that the woman and the Schoolmaster met with other than accident?"

Inside the dark and sulfurous hut the Schoolmaster put aside all pretence and became the quick-thinking, stern man of emergency. Nell Clark, too, who might have been forgiven in the circumstances for showing a trace of feminine uneasiness, showed up in her true character as a woman who, choosing to join with men in the roughest of men's professions, could play the man with the best of them.

"The next jest promises to be funnier than the last," she remarked. "Shall we burrow beneath the upper wall? Shall we try the main door and rush it? Or does your notion of a jest include our staying to be slowly roasted before being blown into sausage-meat?"

"That's no idea for a merry jape, Nell," he laughed shortly. "But neither is it wise to do things in haste—even with an explosion of ten tons of powder imminent.

"Wait. We'll rest while they sweat at their fagots. Then when they've piled all their fuel they'll set themselves on that side to enjoy the new barbecue, and we'll dig out on the other side and watch, in our turn, how these ruffians enjoy our translation to Paradise, as they imagine."

He surveyed all sides as well as limited vision allowed and remarked, scarcely believing such luck to be possible:

"They seem to be sure we'll break for the window or door, Nell. I see none but a couple of rogues keepin' watch among the trees, and they look as if their tastes run front side wi' the rest. Show yerself at the window at times. 'Twill keep th' dogs amused."

## III

DUSK was falling when several soft thumps outside heralded the first dry fagots. Davies and the woman had rested on the sandy floor for an hour, listening intently to the sounds of crashing branches, swinging axes and rising hilarity. The man from time to time peeped through their vantage hole, and reported such progress as was accomplished toward making of them a burnt sacrifice. When the fagots began to tumble home against the walls he wrenched aside a board from the window, and said with a quiet little laugh:

"May as well have a little light, such as it is, Nell. They'll watch that we don't crawl out, and perhaps it'll help to take their attention away from our real work.

But, —— take it, girl, you're white as death. Afraid?"

The woman laughed bitterly.

"Afraid of nothing on earth, if that's what you mean. I've broken every one of the ten commandments except the one which forbids coveting your neighbor's wife. But I've made one of my own to take that one's place. I have coveted a woman's man instead. So why should I fear? Had I been of a scary sort, d' ye think I would have chosen such a life?"

"Then why shiver? Why so pale?"

"Rage, poor fool; rage! Why shouldn't I look pale, when that scum o' the salt seas outside is licking its chops over my frying for their fun? You'll see color enough in my cheeks when we burst through and face them."

"Then let's get to work," Davies suggested, seizing a cask and rolling it clear of the wall farthest away from the window.

On hands and knees together they dug at the yielding sand with wood taken from a broken box, and the thudding of the fagots outside, and the uproarious yells of the waiting revelers beyond, sounded ominous in the face of the slow progress they made with the digging.

From time to time the woman straightened up to listen. Once she stepped to the window and glanced out. When she rejoined her companion a vivid spot of red burned in each cheek; her bold eyes glittered metallically.

"In ten minutes we must be outside, or frying in our own grease," she said. "The first torches are being lighted over at the camp-fire."

"Then outside it shall be. For I did not risk the seas alone in a cockle-shell, with no crew save my parrot, to make barbecue for John Cook's rabble."

Davies straightened his broad back with a carefree laugh and pulled away a section of the lower wall, letting in a shower of dust and gravel, but also admitting the faint glow which told of a completed outlet.

"Why did you risk that lonely voyage?" Nell asked eagerly, seeming in no way interested in escape for the moment. "I am curious to know what reason was strong enough to impel Edward Davies to part with his imposing whiskers and take to a tiny boat in order to risk his life in John Cook's retreat."

The Schoolmaster sprawled on the floor, his long, powerful arms tugging and pushing at some obstruction just outside which seemed partly to block their egress still; and as he labored he chuckled gently for a moment before answering:

"The rover's lot is not so merry a one lately, Nell. The bulldogs are beginning to discover that faster ships are needed in order to catch the gentlemen of the Black Flag; and faster ships are arriving in the Caribbean. A change was advisable for me.

"Besides, I had just failed in a foolish land enterprise; failed and lost a fortune. That Nicaraguan expedition proved——"

"Was that your exploit?" the woman interrupted him with something of admiration in her tone.

"Nothing to boast about, Nell," he laughed. "I joined up with the Frenchman, L'Escuyler, and together we made the march with seven hundred men. As far as the lake we got, and almost to the city of Ria Lexa. Then a gold convoy fell into our hands.

"There is neither time to tell, nor use in telling, of the failure which followed success so swiftly. I accused the Frenchman of treachery when after a night camp we found the treasure gone like the smoke of a cannon in a breeze. He in turn accused me. His men were tallied; so were mine. Only those who had fallen in the attack on the convoy were missing, and a search of a week failed to discover trace or sign of that store of gold.

"But distrust of each other soon set our parties to fighting; fever and bad water helped; and in short we parted company vowing vengeance upon each other. I reached the coast alone, save for my parrot here; and after many a long league of tramping the coastline and sailing the coastal seas in any crazy craft I could come upon I got such a boat as gave me hope of reaching here, where I had heard John Cook was getting ready a fleet to round the Horn for a descent upon the Dons of the west coast."

"But Cook has no love for you!" the woman exclaimed.

"He will have when I show him how much easier it is to reach the place where that treasure was lost from the Pacific than by the land journey from the Caribbean."

"Have you heard that this same Frenchman, L'Escuyler, is to join with John Cook too?"

"My parrot told me something of the

kind," laughed Davies, pulling down the parrot from a powder-cask and petting it. "It made me think that perhaps something is known as to where that gold vanished to. But let us creep out. I smell smoke too near for comfort."

"Wait. Curiosity fools many a woman, Edward Davies, and it may fool me; but tell me why, since you have no fear of Cook, you chose to play the simpleton among his men, enduring insults, blows and the fare of a prisoner when you might have asserted yourself and forced this rabble to obedience."

"Was that so easy? Only you have detected who I am, and how you did it the —— only knows. Without the knowledge that Captain Davies commanded them how many of this gang of swine would obey?

"Besides, I want no babbling runaway to carry tidings of my whereabouts just yet. 'Twould get to the Frenchman's ears maybe, and cause him to hang back from the venture."

"Oh, then he knows where lies the treasure, and you do not? Is that the secret?"

"Perhaps," was the laughing rejoinder. "But let that be a secret still, as is the manner of your detecting me. Come. We'll creep out."

He wriggled into the hole they had dug, and only faintly heard the woman's impatient retort as she followed him:

"Plague take you and your secrets! Mine is no secret. I am a woman, ain't I? Can a woman be mistaken in the face of any man she wants to know?"

SMOKE and flickering fires greeted them outside, stopping all talk. Davies thrust his parrot into his pocket and lifted up a fagot, revealing beyond the black loom of the woods, and overhead the blinking stars among the palm-tops.

Around them could be heard the hoarse shouting and crackling of burning fagots; but on the side where they crouched ready for a dash out there were none to see, for the fire had been built highest, and started soonest, on the side where the window was, and there the pirates were gathered, hungrily peering through the thickening smoke reek for the agonized faces they expected soon to appear at the aperture. There two men with long pikes were stationed, to see that escape was made doubly impossible.

"Stay while I get muskets," whispered Davies, letting fall the fagot again. "I saw a movement yonder in the bush."

"Rather haste away from this oven," Nell replied hoarsely. "I am choking. 'Tis but a dozen yards or so to my hut, and once there we can gain entrance by the rear to John Cook's own house. There are arms in plenty, and shelter good enough."

"Then run!" the Schoolmaster gritted.

He helped Nell to her feet with a powerful lift of the arm, and together they darted from the shadow of the powder-store straight for the nearest line of huts. A tremendous roar volleyed up behind them, and for an instant Davies paused, grimly certain that they were seen. But the pirates did not follow, and he dashed on.

In the loom of the houses a dark figure confronted Nell; a cavernous mouth was opened to howl the alarm. Davies struck at the gaping mouth with a terrific straight-arm blow, and the man's head twisted crookedly on his neck when he fell.

"Here! Inside, quick," panted the woman, holding open the door of her own hut.

Davies joined her, and shut the door behind him.

"Now out by the rear!" she cried. "I'll join you in a minute. I needs must change my attire if I am to play tag with these mongrels."

But the Schoolmaster was peering out through the small window, and seized her arm to draw her beside him.

"Look!" he whispered fiercely. "Play the spectator at your own funeral, Nell!"

A shower of sparks flew high in the air; a piece of the store-roof fell, and the pirates scattered in all directions to a safe distance. Then a deep hush fell over all; a mob of murderous ruffians held their breath in expectancy; only the growing roar and crackle of the fire prevented the stillness of the calm night being absolute.

## IV

OUT at sea, just beyond the outer reefs, John Cook, chief of the Aves brotherhood, stood on the deck of a small topsail schooner and stared in angry wonder at the red glow among the trees where his settlement stood. His vessel was sparsely manned, and showed plenty of traces of recent rough handling. Gaping bulwarks and splintered spars, patched sails

and plugged sides, testified to the good-will of whoever it was that gave him the rough handling; but a little knot of sullen men, and the huddled figure of a young girl, testified also that John Cook had emerged victor.

"What d'ye make of yonder blaze?" Cook demanded of the helmsman, a cross-eyed black nearly seven feet in height, a new recruit from the last capture.

"Dat's a fire, cappen," grinned the negro.

"——'s mirth!" roared Cook. "Should I think it a lump of ice, black mule? Is it a bonfire, or what? Have ye no eyes?"

"Sure dat's a bonfire, sar. A —— big one, an' he look to dese yer eyes lak a mighty——"

The man's slow, halting speech was cut short abruptly. A shower of sparks leaped aloft among the trees; a column of red flame followed; then across the placid sea rumbled the terrific explosion of the powder magazine. Trees and bushes, hillocks and tottering houses, all were revealed vividly against the blackened sky as if thrown upon a back scene in silhouette.

And among the glare were many black specks, some of which might by no great stretch of imagination be likened to men's bodies. Then hot and blackened débris began to fall about the vessel, and the pirate danced his decks in capering rage.

"Out boats!" he bawled, and cursed luridly. "Out boats! All that'll float. Man 'em with every oar that'll pull. Take the prisoners too, Carr, ye lousy, slow dog," he yelled to his first mate in frenzy as the distant fire blazed up anew and showed him the houses of the settlement in red relief.

"Hurry with the boats!" he yelled. "Rouse up hawsers and tow me in quickly. If aught is amiss in the island and I am too late to mend it, ye'll taste the mess I'll prepare for ye a hundred years after ye're dead!"

Urged by officers no less anxious regarding their island retreat, the pirate crew tugged at their oars and towed the schooner slowly toward shore. The prisoners labored too, and soft-handed passengers and equally soft-handed captain bent unaccustomed backs under the ceaseless curses and blows of Carr.

On the schooner's deck Cook stood by the helm, impatient of the creeping progress made; and the girl, left alone by the impressment of her male companions in misfortune, sat huddled on the wheel-gratings, trembling with terror, hoping that she might be allowed to remain unnoticed.

From time to time the gigantic black glanced over his shoulder at her, and across his broad, ugly face at such times passed a look of something so close to tenderness as to transfigure him. And toward Cook's back his crooked eyes shot glances not so much of fear as of appraisal.

When the schooner had been towed for half an hour, and the shore still lay vague in distance, yet sharply outlined in the one place by the raging fire, the pirate stepped to the wheel, flung the black away savagely, and took the helm himself.

"Into a boat with you!" he growled. "Put the weight of that great carcass to an oar, and see if I may not yet be in time."

All but inaudible, yet heard by the negro, a little sobbing cry of dismay came from the cowering girl on the grating. With the sharpened wit of desperation the negro dared to question the pirate's command, and to suggest an alternative.

"Ef yo' in a hurry, cappen, I kin row yo' ashore in one ob dem boats myself in quatter o' hour. Take we fo' hours yit befo' we tow dis schooner to anchor, sar, dat's a fack."

"By the Great Horn Spoon, you're almost human!" exclaimed the pirate with a keen look at the expressionless black. "That's a real good notion, by thunder!

"Here, Carr!" he bawled over the bows. "Drop back with your boat and kick half o' your lazy dogs back on deck. I'll row ashore."

Then, turning aft, he laid a heavy hand on the shoulder of the trembling girl.

"Up you get, girl," he said with uncouth softness of tone. "You're going ashore, my pretty, and if you're good you shall be queen o' the pirates."

"I'd rather be dead!" the girl cried, furiously flinging aside his hand.

"You may easily be that, too, my pigeon, if you cross John Cook," the pirate laughed grimly. "But into the boat with you, quick. Here, Goliath, take her and drop her into the boat."

The negro grinned at the new name, and went to the girl. She flashed a look of scorn at him, as if to remind him that he was a traitor to his own captain, and a recent traitor too.

But he persisted, and swung her upon his

great shoulders, and she suddenly resigned herself to his hands with a different expression on her face after she had caught a whispered word of encouragement from his thick lips in the darkness while he held her suspended over the boat below.

She made no further protest as the boat sped away shoreward. Cook sat beside her, but he was too intent upon his steering to take notice of her then; and Goliath pulled the stroke oar, his ebony visage within three feet of her own pale face. And the island seemed to leap up from the sea to meet them under the lashing oars.

Soon the boat was discerned by the pirates ashore, and then they saw too Cook's schooner in the windless offing; and they gathered on the beach, suddenly fearful of the results of their frolic. Besides the wreckage of his boats, strewn by storm along the beach, their captain must step ashore to find his settlement half-destroyed by fire, started by the idle rogues he had left behind to guard his interests and their own.

As the boat grated on the pebbles, Doggett stepped among his fellows and growled fiercely:

"Nell started it; d'ye understand? Nell Clark and the Schoolmaster. Cook's woman philandered with our prisoner, and they started the fire and perished in it. Stick to the tale, bullies, and we'll pull clear yet."

THEN John Cook strode into their midst, and his path was clogged by shattered timbers and smoking débris; his nostrils were assailed by the reek of burning fagots; his eyes smarted with the smoke of his houses, his stores, his powder magazine. And it was the latter which touched spark to his seething fury and caused it to explode.

"What dog's trick have ye played me now?" he demanded, and his fierce gaze, sweeping the crowd, sent a shiver through the hardiest.

Rando and Doggett, bold leaders of the rabble in the master's absence, skulked behind the rest like the veriest curs now that John Cook confronted them. The captain uttered his demand again; his cutlas rasped from the scabbard and he seized the nearest ruffian by the neckerchief.

" 'Twas the woman, captain; 'twas Pirate Nell," the man choked, fear of death in his bloodshot eyes.

"What d'ye mean, hound? Speak truth, and quickly, if ye have a liking for life."

"The woman and the Schoolmaster, captain. They set fire to the powder-house. They were inside, captain. Oh, ——'s truth!"

"Liar!" Cook spat.

He flung the man from him; his cutlas whistled in the air, and cleft the falling rascal from crown to collar.

"Step up, Doggett!" he cried sharply. "I'll have the truth o' this scurvy homecoming from somebody, or all shall hang by the thumbs over such a fire as this can never grow to!"

Doggett slouched forward, his hangdog face downcast, but with hope in his gloomy eyes.

"What means this bloody destruction, Doggett? Where is Nell Clark, and who is this pestilent Schoolmaster yonder liar spoke of?"

"He spoke true, cap'n, for most part," replied Doggett sullenly. "A half-wit man with a parrot on's shoulder, drifted in here in a small boat alone, just after you sailed. He was no sailor, but a pretty, throstle-throated puppy who amused us with his singing. We called him Schoolmaster, for he soon began to teach our Nell fine lessons.

"I told him to lay off from boardin' your craft, cap'n, and the men handled him rough enough for his free-and-easy impérence to them and us all. But Nell sort o' took a slant to him, did the wench, cap'n, so I says to Rando, says I, 'We ought to see as our cappen's property ain't stole.' And Rando says, 'Right.' So we lays for the Schoolmaster, and gives him a deal about it. Then Nell comes between us, and knifes Rando here. 'Most kills him, she does, and she and the Schoolmaster runs to the powder-house and defies all your men, cappen."

"By the gratings of Eblis! If you speak truth I'll flay them both alive," swore Cook, purple with rage. "If you lie——"

"I don't lie, cappen," Doggett hastened to vow. "She told him she'd make him cappen instead o' you. Then after a bit they opens the door, the chap comes out trundlin' a cask o' powder with a fuse alight, and tries to blow yer loyal men to bits, cappen.

"They dodges back, but the fuse was short. The blessed bomb blew up, set fire to the store and the houses and scorched a hundred good lads, cappen. And by the same token it blew them two sky-high, too!"

Cook was plainly impressed by the plausible tale; yet he hesitated to believe all this about Nell Clark. The woman was a fellow pirate to him, and no more; she was no more than that to any man, so far as any man dared say; but she had always showed fearless courage coupled with true-steel loyalty, and such traits were ever a bond of affection between brave men, whether within the law or without it. The pirate captain ran his eye over the hangdog throng, and singled out a youngster who hung in the rear.

"Speak, you smooth-faced dog!" he gritted, with his blade lifted high in air above the lad's head. "Is this tale true, or does Dogget lie to save his scurvy neck?"

The lad trembled, but was silent. The blade trembled, but still remained poised.

Back of the crowd a disturbance began, and men glanced fearfully at some apparition approaching. Then out before John Cook stepped Nell Clark, dressed in seagoing man's attire, belted and booted, the pirate to her finger-tips; and with her strode the Schoolmaster, dressed as he was before, but wearing an expression on his handsome face which was a revelation to his late tormentors.

"Doggett lies!" cried Nell. "Am I blown up, or burned alive?"

"Doggett surely lies, captain," laughed the Schoolmaster, gazing steadily into Cook's amazed face. "I am neither dead, nor resurrected, nor a robber of another man's dove-cote."

He and Nell swiftly stepped beside Cook, and together they faced the sea of upturned faces upon which sat amazement, awe, disbelief, and terror.

"Oh, the liar! There's blood on th' moon!" squawked the parrot with vast ruffling of wings and a side-cocked eye.

## V

A SOFT little hand slipping into her own sword-calloused palm startled Nell out of her momentary intensity of attention. She turned, saw the shrouded figure of the girl captive, and in a moment the dormant woman within her put words of comfort into her mouth, and delayed the fierce resentment that jealousy brought to her later.

"Seize him! Iron the whelp till I can flake him!" snarled Cook, flinging an arm toward Doggett.

Men closed about the trembling Doggett, in haste to please their angry captain even to turning upon their shipmate whom they had been so ready to follow blindly a moment before.

"Seize Rando, too!" Nell Clark cried spitefully, mindful of the man's part in starting the trouble.

Doggett and Rando leaped to sudden life in face of the menace of what they knew well from experience must prove to be nothing less than their end, and an agonizing one. Like beasts preparing to leap they crouched before their advancing shipmates, then sprang into the thick of the mob.

"Ye'll take me dead then!" screamed Rando, his cutlas swinging. "Follow me, Doggett! We'll cheat the dogs!"

There was a whirling clash of biting steel, the staggering impact of furious men, and the two culprits burst through and into the thicket under the palms, with a howling pack at their heels.

John Cook laughed grimly. Then he blew three blasts on his deck whistle, recalling the men.

"Let be, men; let be! Aves is but small. They won't swim away. Get busy, you lousy tipplers, and save what ye can from the wreck. Cast sand on the fire.

"You—" he turned savagely upon the Schoolmaster— "I'll attend to presently. For now, show me how much of a man ye are. Take men and pull down the huts next to the farther edge of the fire, that we lose not all.

"Away with you, Nell, and take this shivering wench with you. And see that you lodge her snugly. If aught happens to her that should not, I'll have that to say to you that'll shiver ye out o' yer man's boots and make ye wish ye'd remained a woman as ye were made."

Through the remainder of the lurid night the pirates sweated and cursed at their hot, heavy labor. Two hours after Cook landed the schooner dropped anchor off the beach, and the rest of the pirates leaped ashore and joined in the work of salvage; and at dawn the settlement lay like a leprous ulcer—a ring of white huts about a blackened spot, in the heart of which red embers still glowed angrily but harmlessly.

The captain inspected the ruins with a

gloomy eye, muttering fiercely as he discovered again and again losses of stores and gear that he had been counting upon for the fitting out of the expedition nearest his heart.

For the time being, all thought of punishing the rascals who had caused the disaster found no room in his seething brain; the sight of his greater ships, scattered broadcast along the shores, utterly wrecked; the few paltry small craft still lazily pulling at their frayed cables; most of all, that great store of arms and munitions gone up in smoke, struck him a blow not easy to bear. Carr, his chief lieutenant, accompanied him in moody silence, not daring to break in upon Cook's black ponderings.

Apart from the outer huts, four men paced back and forth disconsolately: the captain and three passengers of the last of the pirate's victims. No need was there for guard over them. Everywhere they looked armed pirates swarmed, too wide-awake under their chief's searching eye to relax vigilance. As for the girl captive, if she was not sleeping, she was at least so far resigned under Nell's charge as to remain in the hut and rest.

Cook glanced all around in final scrutiny, then strode to the water's edge with his mate.

"This is a ——fire price to pay for a month's cruise, Carr. Half the settlement burned, all my seaworthy ships, all my powder and small arms! And to balance, what? One plaguey brig taken, with not enough booty in her to pay for powder spent; the schooner knocked to staves— Blood o' Moses!"

" 'Twould have been better had ye sunk yon prisoners too along with their brig, captain. Ain't no good to come to us out o' that pale-faced, shivering wench. Did ye see the scowl o' Mistress Nell Clark?"

"Satan broil ye! The wench is mine. Ye have the loot to balance my share. As for Nell Clark, she asks to be treated as a man among us, and by the lord o' —— she shall be. Let her meddle if she dare. Am I the man to be scared of any woman, Steve Carr?"

Cook paced the sands awhile, deep in thought, and with each turn he made his eyes revealed more ruin to him. He halted again beside the mate and snarled:

"Let no man sleep until I hear from ye what, to the last nail and rope-yarn, is left to us. Count the men. I'll not be cheated out of share of that Nicaraguan booty for this set-back.

"We agreed to join Swan, out from England, with ship for ship, man for man, gun for gun, and on equal shares, to sail together to meet the Frenchman off Callao on like terms. Look—" he exclaimed bitterly— "at the equipment with which to carry out our part! So do you be in two places at once, and make every useless dog o' the crew jump to the whip and let's lade all we have into our best bottom and leave Aves to the crows."

"And d'ye think Swan will accept such a mongrel outfit?" laughed Carr impudently.

He thought he saw in Cook's delay over the punishment of Doggett and Rando signs of unaccountable weakening of will; this latest announcement sounded to him, knowing the character of the pirate Swan, like proof that John Cook's leadership was likely to prove less unassailable than it had always seemed; and the mate, ever watchful for his own chances of leadership, shrewdly ascribed the change to the advent of the pale-face girl whom the captain had claimed.

"Cap'n," he leered, "when we meet with Swan on the high seas he'll take our guns and powder, take the wench from ye and send us all packing. Then he'll sail away to join the Frenchman——"

"Carr, ye're the same solid-skulled swab ye ever have been," Cook laughed without malice. "If the venture gives ye shivers, why, stay behind along o' Doggett and Rando, my buck. I'll join L'Escuyler with a squadron as promised.

"And listen. While about the task I gave ye, take a look now and then at the Schoolmaster. Watch the swing o' shoulder, the leap from the hip, his eye—rummage in that thick head o' thine and see if no light comes to ye.

"Away with ye now, and have news for me by noon. I'm for the schooner, to save what may be saved before she cradles herself forever in the mud of Aves."

TO THE half-filled schooner the captain rowed himself, chuckling hugely. The brotherhood of the Black Flag might be only a brotherhood in name; times had been, still were, when one rover would attack another of the same breed in a slack season for merchantmen, and oftentimes win a richer booty by the act, though certainly purchased at a high cost in life and limb.

But while the mongrel crews changed so often, by desertions, casualties and new recruits, that shipmates might well be strangers to each other during the greater part of their first cruise, there was no such want of acquaintance among the captains, or among those of the first flight in rascality; and Edward Davies was too near the summit of the profession to fool one so close to his own eminence as John Cook, at least for long.

"Lack o' beard deceived me first sight," he chuckled. "Not in daylight, though! What Ed Davies wants o' me is locked in's own cunning brain. No love's lost between us, for a cert. But John Cook's no dummy rover, either.

"Take a chance, John; take a chance. Sure 'tis that Davies was with the Frenchman on that treasure raid, and one or t'other knows where the treasure lies. Which one, Lord knows, but with both in company——"

He ran alongside the schooner, and the waiting watchmen lightened up their hangdog faces at seeing a smile on his, where they had looked for black fury likely to fall on them as heavily as upon their delinquent comrades ashore who had caused the disaster.

"We've ground at the pumps all night, cappen, but she fills too fast," the boatswain reported glumly enough. "She's too shattered below waterline to hold the plugs."

"Pump her again," replied Cook, appraising with his keen eye the amount of gear which might be salved.

There were the guns—small, and but six of them—and spars, and tackle in plenty, if it could be gotten out before the vessel disappeared below water. She was anchored in sixteen fathoms of water, for she had come in on a falling tide, and the shore was treacherous by night. But now with the sun behind her the obstructions between her and the shelving beach were clearly visible, and there was the answer to the problem in part.

"Shake her up for a spell, bullies," Cook encouraged the sweating gang at the pumps. "Only free her a foot or so and I'll broach a cask o' the blackest rum when her keel scrapes sand at the beach."

Then as the laboring pumps clanked and gushed torrents he went to the signal locker and took out flags—urgent, and recall flags. He loaded an after gun and fired it himself and sent aloft the flags while yet the smoke rolled landward on the brisk morning breeze.

In answer every man able to find room crowded into what boats were left ashore, and boarded the schooner.

"Another gang at the pumps, lads!" was the order. "Carr! Get ye for'ard and slip the cable. Make what headsail there's gear to set, and then stand by with all hands along the starboard side to cant shorewards when she strikes. All's not lost till ye're moored to Execution Dock, by thunder."

High tide in the afternoon saw the vessel aground on the hard beach, leaning shoreward at an angle which made the swinging out of guns and spars a simple matter. Then with hawsers fast to rocks and trees to keep her where they had placed her, leaving the sea to breach her seaward side as it willed, the sand to fill and steady her, Cook saw his precious guns and more precious powder safely ashore and called the day done. A wise captain is he who can snatch seemingly unsparable hours from work to recreate his men.

"Eight hours y' have, y' jolly cubs o' Satan," he shouted cheerily when the last cask of powder, the last rack of grapeshot, the last roll of lead was ashore and snug under cover. "Kill yourselves beef, and broach ye a cask o' liquor. Swill and stuff till ye choke if that's yer notion o' happiness. When the bo'sun pipes 'all hands' ye'll neither eat nor slumber till ye're afloat wi' Aves astern and the biggest venture ye ever faced afore ye."

## VI

WHILE the barbecue fires again made red splashes in the green of the woods, and boozy ruffians drank and stuffed themselves to the semblance of wallowing hogs, Cook flung himself down in his hammock and took his own dissipation in sleep.

This recent cruise had been taken with a shrewd purpose. Knowing Swan too well to take undue risks at the outset of their mutual voyage, he was determined that his own fleet should be just so much more powerful than Swan's as to assure him a favorable balance if ever a disagreement cropped up between them. And that such was probable he well knew by the very nature of the quest they were to embark upon.

To that end he had taken his fastest schooner and gone to the rendezvous appointed, intending to spy out the strength of the ships outfitted in England, and to turn then and run back to Aves to man his own capital ships before joining Swan with an excuse for his tardiness.

Swan himself proved the laggard, and Cook was forced by lack of water and provisions to cut short his scouting venture. It was on his way back to Aves that, falling in with a deep-laded brig, his instincts forbade him to leave a booty unattacked; and the taking of her had both hindered him just so long as to make the holocaust possible in his settlement, and lost him the one stout craft left after the hurricane had played havoc among his ships and barks.

The loss by storm he had to accept as a chance of the sea, his presence could never have altered that. But he could have prevented the disaster following upon the pirates' choosing to carouse instead of trying to salvage his ships' gear. And but for meddling with that brig—a veritable hornet she had proved—he had arrived home at least with one fast, stout schooner as the nucleus of a squadron of sorts. Now it was a problem how to carry men and armament sufficient to make even a showing when Swan cast eyes over it.

His slumber was uneasy, therefore. He awoke after an hour with a body rested somewhat, but a brain less easy than when he lay down.

"Plague seize the rum-swilling dogs!" he swore, leaping to the floor and buckling on his weapons. " 'Twould be as well, nearly, to sail away with Ed Davies alone to join Swan!"

He stopped in the doorway, catching sight of the Schoolmaster close by.

"But who knows which side Davies would lean to? And maybe it's the Frenchman after all who is in the secret of that booty. Certain it is that Swan has the ships now; and should Davies, who never loved John Cook overmuch, cast his secret in my lap?"

HE STRODE out, called the Schoolmaster and took him to the boats on the beach. On the way he summoned a crew, and put out to make a round of the five decked sloops and an open lugger which remained to him of all his formidable armada. A beamy sloop of twenty tons appeared to have the greatest lading capacity, though wofully lacking in lines of speed; and this craft was boarded first, the crew remaining in the boat at the boarding-ladder.

"Now what d'ye want o' me, Ed Davies?" demanded Cook suddenly, facing the Schoolmaster in the deep waist of the sloop.

Davies laughed shortly, for Cook's hand was upon a murderous horse-pistol. The laugh irritated the already sore-tempered pirate.

"Y' have seen the wreckage o' my gear, and it is yet to be seen that 'twas none o' your cunning hand's work," Cook snarled. " 'Tis a scurvy time to laugh, by Satan!"

"I choose to laugh rather than blubber, Cook," the smiling Schoolmaster returned coolly. "Shall I kneel to ye because o' that —— big pistol? As for yonder pretty mess, are ye fool enough to believe that I, who was shut up inside the powder-house, set fire to it? D'ye see any bits o' me among the palm-tops?

"See, here's Bravo, my parrot. D'ye see aught o' sin in him?"

He took the parrot from his wide coat-pocket and set it on his shoulder.

"Speak, Bravo."

"There's blood on th'—" screeched Bravo.

Cook made a step forward in fury, and the bird sidled around his master's neck, his raucous exclamation stopped abruptly. From his new vantage point he glared with one sidewise red eye at Cook.

"Clap a stopper to that fowl's infernal clack 'fore I twist off its head!" the pirate growled. "I ask ye what evil wind or tide brought y' here to Aves. Are y' for me, or is your own ship lying off to spy on me?"

Davies laughed again softly, and his gray eyes met the black ones of Cook unwinkingly.

"I have neither ship nor men," he replied. "Well you know that, and well it is known in every rover's harbor in the Caribbean. I am here to join you, John Cook. I have interests in the country you are bound for, and since I may not sail my own ship thither I would like well to join my old crony, Captain John Cook."

Cook scowled darkly at the mocking face before him, and his pistol was half-drawn.

"Well I know that I'm no crony o' yours," he retorted. "And yonder you see plain enough the fettle we are in for any man to join us. But sail I shall, and that before another sunrise, and if y' choose to join me,

even to the length of upholding my weaker hand against Swan, why, I reckon there's room for such a man as I know y' are, Davies. But hark to what I say!"

The great pistol was drawn; the wide muzzle gaped in the Schoolmaster's calm face.

"One captain sails in John Cook's ship, and that's John Cook. And if y' know aught about that Nicaragua booty—which I doubt, or y'd have gotten men and ships easy elsewhere—y' are to use the knowledge in our own behalf, and no other. Swan, the Frenchman, and all the fiends o' Eblis sha'n't rob me o' one gold-piece o' that loot once I lay eyes on it."

"Then why sail in company?" mocked Davies.

"——'s mirth! Do I know where 'tis? Am I strong enough alone to make such a cruise profitable if I fail to find it? Cities there are to be sacked, with a company strong enough; they'll fill our pockets even if we fail to discover that which will fill our holds. And 'tis the Frenchman, Swan says, who holds that golden secret."

"Then we sail tonight?" smiled Davies apparently having no further interest in the Frenchman or the treasure, but only anxious to leave Aves.

"We?" retorted Cook savagely. "I sail tonight. Y' have not passed word with me yet. And have ye nothing to say about what yon Frenchman may know? If you know nothing, what in a fiend's name shall I carry y' along for? Ballast?"

"Then we sail tonight," Davies stated coolly. "You are my captain, John Cook, for so long as I sail in your ship. As for what the Frenchman knows, or what I know—I tell ye we were both there by the lake when twelve ass-loads o' yellow gold vanished like smoke in a breeze. To know more than this y' have to wait, my captain.

"Now let's to work. Here are five little ships, and only two of 'em are likely to sail the island out o' sight. Rig 'em all. Load all stores and arms, save bare rations for the crews o' the rest, into this sloop and that white craft yonder, and trust in the rover's luck to find us better craft as we cruise."

"And d'ye think Swan'll accept such a scurvy flotilla?"

"If he won't, we'll take his own!" snapped Davies; and as if by some swift transformation the so-called Schoolmaster became the man of action, terse and decided, already overshadowing the slower-witted Cook by sheer force of intellect.

## VII

THROUGHOUT the hot day the tipsy rovers toiled at unwelcome tasks, driven by fear of Cook, and driven harder by a new master; for Davies had usurped the place of Carr as naturally as if he had been promoted under the king's seal. And since no better seaman sailed than Edward Davies the work was planned for swift and sure results; because he proved on the bodies of Cook's boatswain and carpenter that he was their master, the work went on apace for all the black looks and red curses sent his way.

From the gear of the stranded schooner new masts and booms were furnished for the two sloops chosen to carry Cook's chief followers and effects; from her shot-holed sails came stouter wings for those sloops; her guns and munitions went to arm them, and her water-casks, added to those from ashore, filled their holds along with what scanty store of provisions remained. Then, the last sail bent, the last rope rove, Cook called his ruffians around him on the shore.

"Stand out as I tally ye off," he snapped. "Steve Carr!" Carr stepped forward smartly, for he had entertained a suspicion for hours past that the newly fledged Schoolmaster had supplanted him. This call for him first of them all reassured him. He grinned venomously at Davies, who stood beside the captain without a trace of interest on his calm face.

"Fitton!"

A mean-faced, stoop-shouldered youngster stepped out.

"Garret!"

Another followed; then two more were called, and Cook paused. Into his crafty eyes crept a wicked glint. He cocked a pair of pistols ostentatiously, thrust his hard face forward and snarled:

"Steve Carr, take your gang and have me a score o' bulls killed and flayed within the hour. The rest o' you pretty birds get your personal arms and baggage down to th' beach as quick as ye know how. Take then what boat gear is left, and build me a fire on the headland.

"You, Davies, choose me a full crew to your own liking for the fat-bellied sloop, our flagship. She'll carry a hundred men if

ye stow 'em fair. You'll command the white sloop."

He grinned wickedly as he sought out the schooner's carpenter and boatswain.

"Here, my bold fellows! Ye've been shipmates along o' me and I like ye well. Today I set ye to work under a better seaman than both o' ye'd make rolled into one, and like the fiery lads ye are ye rebelled and were manhandled in proper shape. But I love ye, blast ye, and I'll give ye promotion.

"Boatswain, you command the lugger. Chips, take you command of the small sloop. Pick yer own rascals, for I know ye'll choose yer like."

Glancing over the puzzled gang, he picked out a furtive Spaniard whose gleaming teeth accentuated the apprehensive grin he wore.

"Ha, my noble Ortega, you too have sailed long with me. You shall command the other sloop. Oh, I'm a just and generous man! Ortega goes on a captain's share, lads. Ha' ye any fault to find?"

"No fault," muttered a one-eyed brute thrust forward as spokesman by his mates after a short spell of argument. "But we're all comrades o' the Jolly Roger, cappen, ain't we?"

"We are," grinned Cook.

"And all ekal?"

"All equal as to voice, lad."

"Then what we wants to hear ye tell is this, cappen: Ye're makin' cappens an' disratin' Steve Carr wi'out command; most o' them boats ain't no sounder nor babby's cradles to go seafarin' in, and we wants to know what's the lay? What about the west coast venture, cappen?"

"And I'll tell ye, my bold heroes. Steve Carr's elected to a better berth; a more important one if ye will. Such craft as are left must serve till better can be taken. Thank yerselves for drunken swine that ye let my ships go to pieces in the bay.

"As for who commands my fleet, am I not taking one o' these same leaky sloops myself? Davies takes th' white sloop; and if Ortega and the others must take smaller ships, why, —— me, somebody must take 'em, hey?"

"I take de place of mate wid you, sar, an' let Squint have de sheep you geeve me," smiled Ortega, his yellow face a shade paler under the conviction that Cook was concealing some dark purpose toward his company.

"Fight it out between you, you mutinous dogs!" growled the captain, pretending anger he was far from feeling.

He left Davies in charge of the work, and strode off to his hut, where he had shut up the girl from the brig in company with Nell Clark. The other prisoners he had confined in the pirates' own calaboose until he was ready to announce his plans for their disposal.

Goliath, the giant negro taken from the brig, was destined to sail boatswain with the commander, and it was not entirely his qualities as a seaman that suggested the decision. Cook had seen, without caring about the reason, that the girl he had taken appeared less terrified with Goliath than with himself or any of his leering ruffians, except perhaps Davies; and it was no part of John Cook's purpose to trust his pretty, trembling captive with the handsome, gentlemanly Edward Davies.

He was taking the girl in his own ship, intending if all went well to let her command him and the ship too if she would; but should Swan deride him for his paltry contribution to the forces then the girl might be useful as a deciding element with Swan. Whichever course proved the better, Goliath would well earn his promotion by his ability to handle the captive quietly.

As for Nell Clark—well, he would attend to her case right away. He found the negro, told him of his promotion, sent him down to oversee his part of the work and told him to return when ready to take the girl on board. Then he went into his own hut, and lost no time about his errand.

"GIRL," he said sharply, "get ready for sea at once. I take you with me, my pretty, and the quicker you dry them weepy eyes and find a smile or two for me, the quicker you'll have me for yer chosen man. But have me ye shall, whether chosen or not, and Goliath'll see to it.

"If nothing will persuade ye, then, —— me, I'll sell ye to the first dirty pirate I fall in with at sea."

"You shall never take me alive to your ship," the girl cried furiously; and her eyes were not weepy as she said it, either.

Nell Clark had apparently revived the girl's spirit. Now the older, worldlier woman patted the captive on the shoulder soothingly.

"Hush, girl," she said.

There was soothing in the words, but metallic hardness in the tones. Nell's eyes flashed fire as they sought to fix the averted glance of the pirate.

"Hush, girl," she repeated. "I shall be with you, and naught shall happen to ye while I'm by."

John Cook laughed gratingly.

"Don't fool yerself, Nell. I have better work for ye than nursing fretful wenches. You stay behind in Aves, my lass, to guard our interests here. I have no room for such as you, since ye must be treated as a man, by Satan! Nor is there room for such as Steve Carr, who grows insolent in his looks, though the dog's afraid to let's tongue wag insolence."

"What? I stay here, alone with Carr?" panted the woman. Her fingers gripped the haft of her knife nervously.

"Not alone, my pretty pirate," Cook laughed. "Ye'll have the poor devils we took from the brig for company. Ye'll have Rando and Doggett——"

"Devil! Swine!" screamed Nell, and leaped upon him with uplifted knife. "I'll see the blood o' your heart first!"

Cook grappled with her as he would with a man, sparing nothing of fury in his counter-attack, for too many times he had seen Nell Clark meet and kill her man in equal combat. Now with a steely grip on her knife wrist he forced her head back with an elbow under her chin until her neck must break or her grip on the knife relax. Cursing him like the profanest of his rascals, Nell dropped the weapon, and he let her fall to the floor. Then he picked up her knife, stuck it in his belt and left the hut, calling back with evil mirth:

"Be ready in an hour, little pigeon. I'll send Goliath for ye. Look over your new command, Nell, and you'll be waving me a cheery farewell yet."

At the shore he found work suspended, and a roaring mob of pirates milling about a fierce conflict going on inside the circle. The tall figure of Davies towered above the rest; and to him Cook forced his way.

"What in the ——'s name's this?" he demanded.

The two men fighting were past recognition. Armed with long knives, they had already slashed and sliced each other out of human semblance; from forehead to waist faces and bodies were crisscrossed with cuts; the ground was a trampled red shambles under their tottering feet. Still they fought with the silent savagery of dogs in a death grip.

"Who is it?" persisted Cook, gripping Davies by the arm.

"You promoted two o' your men," laughed Davies amusedly. "See how they value your honors. 'Tis Ortega and Blink."

"Fighting for the command, hey?" chuckled Cook. "I knew they'd see the advantage of it."

"No, they fight to avoid taking that crazy sloop," retorted Davies, "and Lord knows I have no blame for 'em. But how they're to square things by killing each other's a puzzle too deep for me, too, for if one kills t'other, which seems likely, the loser wins, since he can't take the command he's fought to avoid."

Cook drew his cutlas and burst into the red ring.

"Belay, Ortega! Enough o' this, Blink! D'ye hear me?"

He ran to interpose his cutlas between the men; but he was too late. With the first sound he had uttered, a little snarl of victory, Ortega drove his knife haft-deep down inside Blink's collarbone. Blink sobbed out a bitter curse and stumbled to his knees, clutching at the spouting wound.

But with his expiring spasm he drove his own blade upward in a fierce ripping stroke, and Ortega fell across him, disemboweled; victor and vanquished merged in one red, undistinguishable heap of carrion for the crows of Aves to fight over.

"Now to find another captain," laughed Davies. "Commands are going a-begging. How about it, lads? Who says for a captain's share in the west coast venture along o' John Cook?"

"Ha' done with jesting!" cried Cook, sheathing his cutlas with a crash. "'Tis easy to settle. Are my men on board, Davies?"

"All save the giant negro. He's going up to your hut now. I put half a score o' good men among your crew to make into officers."

"And your sloop?"

"My crew is on board. The rest are divided among the two greater craft left, but are fighting over the division yet, if ears tell anything. 'Tis the small sloop where lies the trouble. None want her, whether with captain's share or boy's."

"Then I'll make the cast for them. Come with me."

"Ye can do without me, captain. Here are plenty o' good men yet, standing by with your stores. I have yet to get my ration of beef from Steve Carr. My own gear, too, is yet on shore. Take others."

COOK grumblingly took his own boat-crew and rowed off to the two vessels named, which might easily be distinguished by the uproar rising from them. The captain leaped on board the boatswain's craft and placed his boat's crew, armed to the teeth, at the rail.

"Belay this hubbub, ye snarling hounds!" he roared. "Here, cap'n!"

The boatswain stepped forward.

"Now do you step over to the other side, my bully, and call over the men ye want o' this unruly pack."

The boatswain obeyed, and there were a score or more left.

"Into my boat, you!" cried Cook, and at the pistol muzzle the surly ruffians filed over the rail.

"Take 'em over to the small sloop now! Come back for me, and we'll settle with the carpenter's pack the same way."

Amid curses from the boat and huzzas from the crew chosen, the boat made the round and came back. Then Cook repeated the procedure with the other manned sloop, and the smallest craft of all was left with a crew big enough for a vessel twice her tonnage, but lacking a captain.

"Choose ye a captain among ye! I'll send the rest o' the bullies on board with yer beef," the commander shouted, and returned to the beach, where a small mob of subdued, muttering pirates clustered about a heap of fresh-killed beef, waiting guidance now that neither Ortega nor Blink could command them.

And Steve Carr's elation had died with the dwindling of his beef heap. He saw Davies moving to and fro among the huts, giving orders and looking more of the commander than even John Cook. And as for himself, here he was still, playing butcher for the fleet, with never a word spoken yet regarding his own post in the venture.

He waited until the last boatload of red meat put off, and accosted Cook as that busy chief started toward his own hut to complete his arrangements for departure.

"Well" snarled the captain; and his eyes and voice told Steve Carr that he was doomed to play victim to some cunning plot.

## VIII

THE westering sun sat flattened by refraction on the horizon. High on the crest of the headland a tall pile of boat timbers and ship wreckage was beginning to show a red crown through a curtain of smoke. A lookout in the head of a lofty palm was taking a last scrutiny of the sea before descending to report all clear for the flotilla's sailing.

"Well, Steve Carr?" Cook snarled again, hand on pistol, face thrust forward menacingly.

"My orders, captain; I ask ye why I, alone o' your officers, am left i' the dark at this late hour. I remind ye of our articles, John Cook. If disratin' me's in your mind, I warn ye it's a matter for all hands."

Carr showed little fear of the chief. Rather, now he faced the issue, there was truculence in his attitude, and Cook knew there was no time to waste. That vanishing sun, the growing fire on the headland which would make of Aves a beacon to be seen for forty miles and surely attract attention should a prowling cruiser chance to see it, warned him that it was high time to embark since the die was cast for the venture.

He had little relish for a fight on hand with Steve Carr, for the man had plenty of followers in the band, and it was not simply a matter of quieting Steve. Cook could be cajoling as well as threatening; and he used cajolery now.

"So that's all, hey, Steve?" he smiled, changing his expression as if vastly relieved.

He thrust back his pistol, and took Carr's reluctant hand.

"Why, Steve lad, I thought ye meant mutiny! Orders? O' course. Disratin' ye? Why should I? Ain't ye my old shipmate and crony? I have sent Davies to the white sloop, y' see, and ye're still my right-hand man, Steve. Did ye doubt it?

"I gave ye work that called for dispatch because I knew ye, Steve. Now there's one more bit o' business for ye while I embark these plaguy women and the prisoners, see? Go into them woods, Steve, and see if ye can call forth Doggett and Rando, the surly dogs. I ain't the man to leave 'em alone here, to starve or be picked

up by a ruddy bulldog. We need all hands, this venture, so I say let bygones be bygones, Steve, atween them and me as well as 'tween me and you.

"And listen, lad. Many's the time I've seen ye cast sheep's eyes on Mistress Nell. She'll have naught o' me as woman to man. So try yer luck, lad; try yer luck wi' the wench."

Steve Carr's gloomy face lightened, and the subtle flattery which hinted at his success where his captain had failed caused him to inflate his chest and carry himself like a cock-sure gallant. Very readily he accepted Cook's explanation.

"Aye, aye, cappen," he agreed, turning to the woods. "If I can get in hail I'll bring 'em. Will ye give a blast o' the whistle when ye have the windlasses manned then?"

"Never fear!" replied Cook, and watched his befooled mate march away into the darkening woods before he moved.

Then he leaped into fierce activity, and bawled for Goliath.

NIGHT came down suddenly upon the setting of the sun; the fire on the crest sent red and yellow spears of flame high into the air. The man in the palm-tree top lingered a moment longer, his elevation giving him a scanty advantage of visibility after the sun had gone from the sight of men on the ground.

"Goliath!"

There was no answer. Cook swore roundly, and called again. Still no response.

"Nell!" he shouted then. "Mistress Nell! Bring the wench, Nell!"

No reply. Out in the anchorage sounded the clank of pumps on board the smallest sloop; the air was full of the sound, mingled with the lurid blasphemies of the crowded ruffians who manned those pumps. The bonfire leaped to the heavens like a volcano in eruption; and the palm-tree lookout swarmed down the long stem in haste, bawling:

"Ahoy, below there! A tops'l too woundy square for aught but a king's ship sticks right in th' sun's eye."

"——!" muttered Cook, flinging wide his door and storming through from front to rear. "Nell!" he bawled again. "Plague seize the hussy! Where's she hid the wench?"

From his hut he ran to the calaboose, fearful for his prisoners. Through the dark, grated openings that served for windows he saw faces pressed against the apertures, and knew that here at least was no trickery. To the shore next he hurried, where his own boat lay, last of them all, waiting for him.

The lookout from the palm top was there before him; lanterns flickered about the black decks of the anchored vessels, and noisy unrest reigned out there. Even the clanking pumps of the leaky sloop had ceased upon the lookout's far-reaching hail.

"Give way, ye sluggish dogs!" he gritted, shipping the tiller and heaving the boat afloat with a pike-staff.

The red glare of the headland fire played luridly upon the faces of his oarsmen; the sound of his boat approaching started the crew of his sloop to heaving on the windlass; again the pumps clanked aboard the smallest craft as he steered past her and headed for his flag-ship.

"Ha' ye the wench aboard, Goliath?" he hailed.

"No, sar! Ah t'ink she go——"

"She's here, captain!" sang out Davies from the white sloop, and there was amusement in the voice.

Cook sheered his boat away from his own vessel and headed toward the other. Then he saw that the white sloop was moving slowly, as if but just breaking out her anchor, and Davies hailed him again.

"Let be awhile, Captain Cook. We heard the lookout's hail, and I started the fleet to getting their anchors. I'll board ye soon's there's wide water about us."

"You'll face me for this, Ed Davies!" roared Cook furiously. "Sail on, ye presuming dog! We scatter now because o' the sail that's in sight; meet me off Dominica south end if we sight not each other before. —— take me if I stomach another commander in my fleet!"

To each of his vessels the same orders were given as to rendezvous, and Cook leaped aboard his own sloop and kicked the boat adrift with a curse.

"Now, ye scum, ye'll take the first stout ship I put ye alongside, or by Satan ye sink before Swan heaves in sight. I want no boat cruise from a sinking ship, not I! Now jump, blast ye. Peak up the mains'l, Goliath. That's good. Up with the jib and stays'l. So! Break out that plaguy anchor, smartly for'ard!"

"Anchor's foul, cappen," came a voice out of the darkness.

"Then slip it. Take an ax to the hawser. Let's away, —— ye. And douse all lights."

He bellowed the order regarding lights to every vessel, and lanterns winked and went out in answer. The flag-ship gathered way, tacked, and crossed the bows of the smallest sloop, on board of which the lurid curses of the men at the pumps swelled the harsh chorus of the men at the crazy windlass as the anchor came home.

"Follow as ye can, my bold lads," Cook roared with a chuckle of wicked sarcasm. "I'll have ye a fine ship ere Dominica's dropped astern."

He laughed aloud at the volley of maledictions that flew across the water in response. It ceased sharply; and, listening intently, he detected sounds which told him they were picking up the boat he had sent adrift.

"A fair wind to 'em, and room in the boat!" he laughed, and applied himself to working his sloop out to sea.

Slowly he ran out until the clanking pumps astern grew faint; but there was a suddenness in the stopping of the sound that made him peer more intently in the direction it had come from. For a minute he was tempted to stand back and see if all was well; then he heard faint voices from the island, answered by those on the small sloop, and again he stood seaward, not at all satisfied that all was well, but too much in fear of that square topsail beyond the island to linger.

As he watched the bearing of the great flare astern, he fell into a black mood which promised little peace to his men until he had faced Davies and put him in his rightful place for his effrontery in taking away the captive whom Cook had reserved for himself. The white sloop was a nebulous blur ahead and to windward, and was outfooting the flag-ship with ease. It was a hint that reprisals must come, if at all, through strategy rather than by speed or force.

"Answer me he shall, for all his heels," growled the captain, taking a final bearing of the fire and setting his off-shore course.

As if in answer the great fire sent aloft a plume of red sparks against which a single tall palm stood out in black relief, one long frond depending toward the fire in gruesome resemblance to a gallows. And from the white sloop came down the raucous squawk of Davies' parrot:

"There's blood on th' moo-oon! Rr-raw-awk!"

"Davies shall eat that blasted fowl alive!" swore John Cook savagely.

## IX

THE white sloop cruised back and forth across the course the others must cover to raise Dominica, out of sight of the land, but near enough to keep the rendezvous within a couple of watches or so. Edward Davies lounged beside the long tiller, a striking figure in his panoply of the rover bent on business. The steersman kept his eyes upon the nock of the mainsail unwaveringly. Knots of idle men about the crowded narrow decks avoided sending direct glances toward the captain. Nell Clark, standing by, regarded the tall pirate curiously.

"John Cook took his hook—
Now he hides on Aves!"

screamed Davies' parrot, ruffling up his feathers and scratching his ear on the pirate's broad shoulder. Nell laughed shortly.

"I was thinking about Cook," she said.

"A plaguing itch seize Cook!" replied Davies with a pleasant grin. "I am thinking rather on the great ship that slipped by us last night. That would have set us afloat in proper fashion, Nell."

"If she was a king's ship, whether of Spain or England, 'twere well she passed us by," retorted Nell, sharply. "If but a fat trader, she's likely to have sisters close on her heels, ain't she? Patience. I can not cast from my mind thought of the wench and her fortunes. 'Tis that which made me think of John Cook. Oh, what a settlement there'll be atween ye both when he boards ye and finds ye have no wench aboard but me!"

Davies laughed outright, a roaring, merry guffaw that started his crowded ruffians to chuckling in sympathy. Not many ships so packed with all the elements of discord could have sailed a thousand miles so placidly as the white sloop under Edward Davies.

"And ye say ye're no wench, but a man, by y'r own choice," Davies remarked. "Well, comrade, as ye say, as ye say!

want no female trouble in my craft; and since ye flouted Cook and now set me in my place, I ha' no fear that any o' my rascals will make ye a woman again.

"But as for Cook, leave worry to me, girl. Rather tell me just how ye worked the trick back yonder in the island. Ye may have started a woundy muddle; we'll know pretty soon; but ye surely made for success in our venture when ye shook out the weepy wench so cunningly."

The woman's face darkened with passion.

"The venture was far from my thoughts then," she retorted. "Win or fail, d'ye think any woman would stand by like a silly sheep and see another usurp her place, take her man?"

"But you vow you would have none o' him, or none o' no man," smiled Davies.

"And what o' that? Since when has woman changed so that she must have a mind unchangeable? What if I don't want John Cook? Shall I let another hussy coddle him? Not while I'm by to see!

"He offered me insult by taking that wench and scorning me to my face. For that I have tricked him now; and for that I shall yet see his bones picked by Andes vultures if Edward Davies but prove himself a man!

"When I smuggled the girl into the calaboose to her father and the other men from the brig, I gave 'em arms, told 'em where the boat lay which should have been taken aboard of this sloop, and bade 'em put out as soon's 'twas dark and sail for Guadaloupe. I told the brig's master of Steve Carr, and Doggett, and Rando, and told him he might please himself about them, but he'd better leave two of 'em at least for the crows to peck at. They might handle Steve all right, and he'd pull a stout oar under pressure. But it's all arranged for 'em now, for the man-o'-war bearing down as we left must surely pick 'em up, and——"

"They'll put the bulldog on our heels!" Davies exclaimed sharply. "Carr knows Swan's rendezvous even if he don't know where we meet Cook."

"Pshaw! And what of it?" retorted Nell contemptuously. "If ye're not a match together for that cruiser, what chance ha' ye all, d'ye think, to maintain place along o' Swan, or later with the Frenchman?

"Besides, man, well ye know the small sloop abandoned the cruise and put back to the island. Even fear o' hanging couldn't make the lousy dogs face drowning! The king's ship'll find a fat covey o' Jack Ketch's partridges waiting for him on Aves.

"Of a surety the bulldog must carry that sloop's crew into Jamaica, since Lord Vaughan has started pirate-hanging in bunches as a social pastime. 'Tis too good a chance to let slip, my friend; and long ere the cruiser can revictual and put out after us we shall have strengthened our squadron, joined Swan and be in the wilderness of the South Atlantic."

"Aye, so may we be," returned Davies musingly.

He paced forward to the mast and back before he uttered the fear that had crept into his heart since the situation back on Aves had been so vividly recalled to him.

"So may we be, Nell, and around Cape Horn too, for that matter. But Cook should never ha' left Steve Carr behind to work us mischief in the rear. 'Twould ha' been easy for us to reach the west coast, and 'tis still, to be sure; but if I know Steve Carr, an' I think I do, he'll turn king's evidence on us and guide what force they may send right to our goal."

"And if he does?"

The woman glanced up into his face with a suspicion of disgust in her own. Up to the present she had failed to find in Edward Davies any of the terrible capability that had made his name fearful.

"Will ye not be in the same case as John Cook, and Swan, and L'Escuyler? Shall we all be in any better case? And shall we not together make a match for the king and Steve Carr in company? Fie upon you, Edward Davies! I had believed you of stouter guts!"

"Pox o' your beliefs, woman!" cried Davies in sudden fury that passed as swiftly as it grew. "Shall I care if all the king's navy bark at my heels? —— me, but 'tis like swallowing one o' Sawbones' black boluses and washing it down with bitter aloes to think that the paltry vengeance of Steve Carr upon John Cook may cheat me of my own errand with the cunning Frenchman!"

He stalked away forward to the bows, and called down his parrot, Bravo, from the crosstrees to dissipate his dark mood which was a rare mood with him. Nell Clark stood stock still and watched him go; and as he passed the galley-house, a smile

of infinite satisfaction crept across her comely face.

"So Edward Davies sails a lone traverse, for all the show of company!" she muttered to herself. "Then if Nell Clark can help to make John Cook's venture even more hazardous than Steve Carr will make it, we may yet see Edward an English lordling in's turreted castle in England, rolling in riches and honors, like the traitor Morgan; and—who knows?—mayhap 'twill be Mistress Nell who, resuming her girlish guise, dangles a bunch o' keys at girdle and——"

She concluded her day-dream with an abrupt, harsh laugh, and a vicious slap at the tops of her high leathern boots—man's boots; the boots of a pirate.

A SCANT sight of Dominica's south end; a leg on the other tack which brought a glimpse of Martinique's high northern end; then a midnight black as Erebus fell upon the white sloop, bringing with it a screaming squall which forced her to run fair for the mid-channel between the two islands.

And in the third quarter of the middle watch, when sevenscore chilled and hungry pirates hung on to whatever security they might find on her streaming decks, avoiding the thunderous, noisome hold and misnamed rest out of sheer terror for their miserable lives, the half-drunken lookout in the cross-trees—half-drunk because no man sober could hang on in the situation—cupped his grimy hands and bawled with the voice of Tempest itself:

"Ship ahead! Ahoy, on deck! Up hellum, up hellum! Oh, mother! She's upon ye! Blast——"

Davies leaped to the tiller and surged it across the deck with all the power of his sinewy frame. But the lookout's cry was halted; the helm acted too late; a gigantic bulk loomed out of the blackness, towering over the low sloop like a cliff, and the roar of a thousand cataracts boomed out of sails and sea-crushing bows as a great ship smashed into the white sloop fair amidships and cut her to the vitals.

Frightened cries pealed from the towering hull; a lantern glimmered along her high bulwarks and hung down her side, while swarthy faces peered into the blackness. A vague patch of blacker darkness showed them where lay the victim of their onset, and out of the blackness rose a frightful chorus of swearing humanity which soon pierced the hazy intelligence of the ship's officer of the deck.

" 'Tis a Don!" yelled a pirate, catching sight of the peering faces above him as his own craft fell apart under his feet.

" 'Tis our new ship, lads!" roared Davies leaping into the ship's forechains as he uttered the cry and extending a hand to Nell. "Up wi' ye, bold rovers! Ye take the ship or sink, —— ye!"

Like a surging tide the pirates nearest the ship poured over her high bulwarks at Davies' heels, while astounded Spaniards, not yet fully awake, stared dumbly at the foremost of them all, high-booted, cutlas-armed, whose long hair streamed in the gale behind her.

"To the poop, Nell!" Davies roared, dashing along the wet decks and bounding up the ladder to face a panic-stricken Spanish captain.

A score of the pirates remained in the forechains, aiding their fellows to clamber aboard out of the heavy-running seas; the rest faced about and drove the cowering crew to the forecastle, where they made a half-hearted stand at the shrill entreaty of the captain, who came running in his night clothes along the squall-swept decks, while from the poop Davies took running shots at him to speed him.

"Clap 'em below, bullies!" Davies cried. "Batten 'em down. They'll make a man apiece to work ship presently."

The ship had been taken with such unbelievable ease that in any other moment but the midst of a screaming squall Davies might have looked for trickery. Now he was too elated at his easy transition from a wrecked sloop to a stout ship to do aught but see that his acquisition was brought through the brief storm in safety.

Her Spanish crew had snugged her down with all the cautious finality of the Don; the ship was so safely shortened as to sail that she barely stemmed the seas, and in the blackness Davies knew that at any minute might come a hail from a sister trader or man-o'-war convoy ship asking if all were well.

He took his whistle and shrilled a summons.

"Away aloft!" he yelled above the gale. "Shake out the reefs in th' tops'ls! Handy, lads! The squall passes, and the Don sailed not alone, I'll wager."

Then he called his gunner, and while the angry skies rang with the howling chanteys of exuberant pirates setting full topsails, the captain passed around the maindeck on a search for the armament of the capture.

"—— me, but she's well fanged, gunner," cried Davies.

He stood in the deep waist, his hand on a carronade.

"See what she has by way of chasers. Blast me, but I think she must carry the metal of a frigate."

The gunner passed forward, and soon returned with a grin of jubilation.

"A sweet long eighteen, cappen! Oh, a gunner's joy of a piece! Loaded too. D'ye think the Dons ha' gotten a scare? She's armed like a cruiser, yet her crew ain't more than twoscore in——"

SUDDENLY the squall passed, and in the abrupt cessation of wind the great topsails thundered in to the masts, not yet mastheaded. Davies mounted the poop, scanning the dark heavens for sign of the breeze which must follow after such a squall, and out of the murk to westward, whence came the first zephyr of the steady wind, loomed a tall shape which the few watery stars revealed as a lofty ship full as big as the one he had made his own in payment for the sloop she had cost him.

Shouts and drums aboard the stranger were followed by the almost magical setting of full topsails and topgallants, while even in the darkness Davies could discern the falling of the great courses.

"By Jupiter! 'Tis a fighting ship!" he muttered, and silently motioned his helmsman to edge away to leeward.

But his own rascals had not so soon got the hand of their new ship as to have set sail so smartly as the man-o'-war to windward; and while yet the capture slowly paid off, the hail came down in Spanish:

"Ahoy, the galleon! What are ye?"

"What a plague's her name?" growled Davies, searching for shot-rack or bucket which might tell him by the painted scroll.

"Galleon ahoy! Who are ye?" came the hail in Spanish again, and the warship squared away and ran down toward them.

"*Madre de Dios!*" roared Davies in desperation.

It was a good guess, since one Spanish ship in every four was named for the Virgin under one title or another; but it proved in error this time; and while excited pirates sought over the stern for glimpse of a name, from the warship's bows a gun crashed out and a shot passed across the captured ship's deck.

"Then, blast me, ye shall have it if ye talk fight," swore Davies with sudden resolve.

He cupped his hands, faced along his decks, and roared.

"Give the Don his answer, gunner! Man the guns, lads, and mayhap 'twill be two ships we have to meet Swan with—or none.

"Rouse out the Dons from the hold, bullies. Set 'em to work making sail; and you, Nell—" accosting the woman as she ran from the great cabin companion, alarmed by the shot— "do you stand watch over the Dons and see that they play us no trickery."

Himself taking the helm until he had gained a position less perilous than immediately under his foe's lee, Davies peered through the brightening night for a sight of the warship's strength. What he saw in the first clear glimpse made him catch his breath, for the ship he had chosen to fight loomed a thousand tons, and her forecastle and high poop bristled with pikes; her maindeck grinned at him across the water with a double row of open ports in which he saw the lighted matches of the gunners.

"But a prize worth the taking," he muttered fiercely. "A prize that may yet sway the balance for me."

"Hoist away on deck!" roared a pirate aloft, who had loosed the main-royal.

"Sway away!" cried Nell in answer, urging on her cowering Spaniards.

And up the yard went, to a mournful tune indeed; and at midmast it stopped, for the warship's ports belched flame and iron, and the ship's decks were a shambles in the wake of the royal-halyard fairleader, where a dozen Spaniards crumpled under the iron of their own countrymen.

A long splinter flew from the mainmast and struck Davies squarely on the breast. With a grim laugh he kicked aside the fallen wood, fetching a deep breath involuntarily at his escape. But it was not personal peril that he was concerned with in that moment; it was rather the fear that another such shot might bring down his spars

altogether, thereby making his capture a burden rather than a prize.

Moreover, by the manner in which his rascals had followed him in the taking of the ship, he was sanguine of further proving their mettle; and it was no wish of his to cripple the warship until she had beaten them off. Time enough to make practise at her motive power when he turned fugitive and she turned chaser.

"Hold, gunner!" he roared.

The men at the guns paused with their matches at the glow. Davies turned the wheel to bring his ship parallel with the enemy, and when he saw the Spaniard's matches flare up again, he gave his orders.

"Give 'em one dose o' cannister, lads. Fire as your muzzles bear on his guns. Then stand by to board."

A skilful touch on the helm brought the ship nearer her foe, and when but a pistol-shot separated them Davies' gunner touched off his own piece and roared—

"Now, lads, fire an' foller me!"

One by one the pirates' guns belched their iron hail into the Don's gaping ports, and shrieks and yells told of shot well sped. Davies threw his helm hard down; then, righting it again before his vessel quite lost headway, he crashed alongside the warship and leaped to the rail, chain and grappling-hook in hand.

"Awa-a-ay boarders!" he yelled, cast his grapnel, and sprang down upon the Don's quarter-deck cutlas in hand with a hundred snarling ruffians at his heels.

## X

NELL CLARK stood on the merchantman's poop, in charge of the pitiful remnant of crew. Battle lanterns flashed on the warship's decks, and clearing skies overhead let through great stars to contribute their light.

The tall figure of Davies was easy to follow as he led his men aft to where the Spanish officers rallied in defense of their ship. Taken by surprize though they were at finding a strange ship flung alongside them so recklessly when no more than a hundred men appeared to oppose their own three hundred seasoned sea warriors, the Spaniards proved of stuff far too stout to yield the pirates an easy conquest.

A stately Don, ruffled and bearded, faced Davies with a cunning sword, and his officers and after-guard backed him so courageously that the pirates found themselves hurled down the high poop ladders before they had got a foothold.

"—— me, ye cringing dogs! Will ye let 'em beat ye off again?" roared Davies, attacking the tall Don furiously.

He alone remained on the poop, and already his doublet showed red in patches.

"Lay on, blast ye!" he cried. "But carry the poop and ye have a ship indeed."

A lightning-like assault forced the Don on the defense, and out of the rapid encounter the pirate emerged with a grim laugh, for the Spaniard's neck ruffle was reddening fast from a shrewd puncture of the throat. Attacked in turn by three officers, Davies retreated stubbornly fighting, bawling for support that never came.

Leaping aside, he snatched a glance behind him, and a bitter curse burst from his dry throat at sight of his ruffians, already giving way and edging shamelessly back toward their own ship. He choked down a sob of despairing rage, and hurled himself more furiously upon his antagonists.

None knew better than Edward Davies that a noosed rope was the tenderest fate awaiting the pirate who survived defeat. He cursed his cowardly rascals from their nativity to their ultimate end, and knew that his curses fell upon heedless ears.

Then suddenly a shot rang out behind him; he heard the ringing laugh of Nell, and a swift glance over his shoulder showed him the widening gulf between the ships.

"Now ye'll fight, ye dirty scum!" cried Nell; and again her pistol spat fire and lead, toppling a leaping pirate from the high bulwarks as he attempted the gulf.

It was then that Davies realized that she had deliberately cast off the grappling-irons, setting herself adrift alone with the trader's own crew, in order that desperation might force the wavering pirates to give Davies the support which could alone save him.

"Oh, a pretty piece o' work, Nell!" roared Davies, again advancing toward the poop. "Now, ye jolly dogs, ye'll carry the ship or hang, by Satan! Shall a woman shame ye? Then come! Huzza! That's you, lousy curs! Ah, it takes the fear o' a dangling rope to stiffen the guts o' ye!"

Through the crowded press in the deep waist the pirates stormed, fighting now with such cold savagery that the Spaniards

wavered in their turn; and, once wavering, there was no recovery for them; for, before their officers could re-form them to start on a deck-sweeping attack, like a pale ghost out of the brightening night appeared the sloop of John Cook.

He had crept up to the scene of battle not knowing who or what the combatants were, but cunningly aware that where there was a fight afoot his advent must sway the decision. And he needed such a ship as that one which lay so dark and silent just off the quarter of the ship where the fight was in progress.

"Sheer off, John Cook!" screamed Nell, hanging by a backstay and leaning out in her excitement until she all but fell between the vessels. "Away with ye and lend a hand to Davies. He has a fleet indeed for ye, ye laggard, unless ye're laggard still."

To do the Dons justice, it must be related that they did not absolutely surrender until a hundred and fifty fresh men followed John Cook up their vessel's tall sides and took them in the rear. Then indeed defeat was certain; and the tall old Spaniard who so stoutly had defended his command proved that he was under no misapprehension concerning his conquerors by his reply to Davies' demand that he surrender.

"Señor pirate, you take my sword from my dead body," he said with quiet dignity; and suited action to words by placing the point of his weapon against his breast and falling upon it.

"It's a brave old man!" sneered Cook, kicking the body contemptuously.

Then he made bold to assume command, taking it as his right.

"Not so fast, captain, not so fast," Davies remonstrated quietly. "Ye're our commander, that's true, but 'tis my own merry lads and Nell Clark who gained ye the ships, and 'tis myself will finish the business of securing them."

"Aye, as ye secured my wench," blustered Cook, fiercely turning upon Davies, who laughed in his face. "There's more than the question of command between us, and 'twill be settled now."

"Nothing will be settled except the picking up of the two craft yet absent, until there's blue water under us. As for the wench, since ye flouted her yourself, and would ha' left her on Aves, why, I ha' taken her——"

"Who are ye driveling about, Davies?" Cook snarled.

"Who else but Nell Clark?"

"Ye said ye had my wench aboard ye."

"Aye, Mistress Nell. T'other chit is safe aboard o' yonder cruiser that hove in sight, I hope, along o' her father. This is no cruise for weepy females."

"Treacherous dog!" cried Cook; and, whipping out a pistol, he aimed it at the other's head.

Davies coolly gripped the weapon, twisted it away and tossed it overboard.

"Are ye mad?" he grated savagely. "Here ye are, in possession o' two fine ships, one a real fighting ship, and ye must peril all out o' childish spleen! I'll meet ye, John Cook, man to man, just as soon as we win clear o' these close waters, but if ye ha' no patience, or threaten me again until I tell ye I'm yer man, I'll see somebody else takes share for ye in the cruise, for —— me if I let ye rob me o' the fruits o' this night's sport."

" 'Tis mutiny, and so ye'll answer for it," growled Cook with ill grace. "But go on and do as ye will, and we'll tally the reckoning in good season."

"That's sensible," laughed Davies carelessly. "First then empty the sloop o' your gear and stores. I'll show ye I'm no mutinous dog by letting ye take this fine frigate. I'll take the merchantman. So do ye take out all your men, and into the sloop then we'll put the Spaniards and set 'em on their way to the islands.

"Ha' ye seen aught o' the lugger or the other sloop? I make a shrewd guess the small sloop came not far with ye, John."

"She put back before we covered a league," growled Cook. "We saw the other but six hours back, and they should be in sight from this tall ship's truck."

DAWN revealed two stout ships full of Cook's rovers winging swiftly eastward, and a floundering lugger, and a dismasted and dismantled sloop, mere specks far astern. Just lost to sight beyond the horizon to the northward a larger black sloop sped with all the aids of desperate seamanship to carry her teeming freight of the Spanish cruiser's company into a friendly port before stores and water failed.

At noon, on the deck of the *Cadiz*, which Davies had discovered was the name of the merchantman that had run him down, the

negro giant Goliath stood beside the ornately carved wheel, conning the course. Apart, facing to the south, Davies balanced himself on wide-spread feet, observing the meridian altitude by means of an ancient cross-staff, the only instrument to be found in the ship's equipment. His own navigational furniture in the white sloop had been simply an imperfect chart, drawn by himself from memory, and his own deep store of sea-lore with a compass to guide him.

While waiting for the sun to come to maximum altitude, from time to time he scanned the southern horizon where the Spaniard's cruiser kept company with him under the command of John Cook. And ever and again, when the glaring sun snatched gleams of white and gold, black and gray from the distant ship, a sinister smile lighted up the face of Edward Davies, and he chuckled as he applied himself to his observation anew.

"Make eight bells!" he called out presently, the sun having ceased rising; and as Goliath stepped forward with tremendous dignity—to order a pirate to strike the bell hanging so near that he himself might have struck in half the time taken to call the man—a distant gun on the cruiser sent out the agreed signal to close for a consultation.

Goliath gave his order, then stood watching Davies in mute question. In the great cabin skylight the face of Nell Clark appeared as she stood on a chair below in her eagerness to learn what would be the captain's answer to that summons, for the giant black, on being transferred by Cook to the *Cadiz* in order that he might play the spy upon Davies, had cunningly concealed his elation at the chance, and whispered that to Nell which she in turn told to Davies—news that left it still an open question as to what he would do now that he had a stout ship and a full crew, armed and stored, and not yet committed to open piracy, at least as regarded himself.

"So John Cook has me at's finger-ends, hey?" the captain laughed, suddenly meeting Goliath's startled gaze. "I am soft because I let him take the cruiser and kept the trader, which is faster, needs less of a crew, an's near as well armed as his— What d'ye say he's named his new flag-ship? *Scorpion*? A name wi' a sting to't!" the captain laughed softly.

He turned toward the *Scorpion*, and his bronzed face was convulsed with anger. Then, booming down the wind, came a second peremptory summons from Cook, and the flag-ship squared her yards and headed down toward Davies.

"Hold the course!" came the swift order, and Goliath stepped forward at a sign and headed the watch to trim sheets and braces to get the last fathom of speed out of the ship.

Davies had made his decision; he would ignore Cook now, and carry on to his destination in his own way, in full determination to hold his own rights against all the strength John Cook would muster against him.

"A catspaw he'll make o' me, yes?" Davies muttered with a grim smile, scanning the windward sea for sign of sail or coast. "He'll follow me a merry dance before he does that! If he must meet Swan, he dare not follow far; and in a ship stolen from his Majesty o' Spain he dare not sail far without Swan's ships to support him."

In the rearranging of crews when the sloop and the lugger were picked up in the night the boatswain, Kestral, elected to join the Schoolmaster, and him Davies had made first mate, making Goliath his second officer out of sheer liking for the huge negro's palpable lack of all guile.

Now he called Kestral to take the watch, bade him and Goliath divide up the men into two gangs, and went below thoroughly to overhaul and inspect his ship so that he might, by arriving at full knowledge of her resources, plan his course for the immediate future.

## XI

THOSE were days of barren oceans. Not a speck of sail marred the unbroken horizon for weeks as the *Cadiz* passed out of the Caribbean and its keel-furrowed seas into the vaster emptiness of the great Atlantic.

Long before the Line was reached a subtle change had entered the ship. Davies in selecting the crews before quitting the island had given still another example of his consummate shrewdness; every man placed aboard his own command had been afloat with Cook while the trouble was afoot around the powder-store; not a man of all the howling mob that had sought his blood found place in the white sloop.

And once they had carried the Spaniard by boarding and had sailed John Cook below

the horizon, an influence worked among them, fostered by Goliath and Nell Clark, and in less degree by Kestral, who was not yet convinced, which gradually showed them how they stood to win all and lose little by following Edward Davies in any direction he choose to travel, ignoring Cook and Swan and the Frenchman himself if necessary.

On the day when St. Paul rocks slipped over the sternward sea-line and the forefoot all but touched the equator, Davies came on deck after working out his position and took his stand on a quarter-deck gun, whistle in hand. For fifteen minutes he stood motionless; keenly regarding the broad decks on which a full crew worked leisurely yet well, in a manner which a real merchantman sailor might well attribute, had he seen it, to visions and hallucinations; in a manner, in truth, telling of satisfied seamen, good seamen, who still hugged the knowledge that they were free and equal men, pirates avowed and committed, and as such subject to no such restrictions as governed the miserable Jacks who cringed within the law.

There were no laws, save those of brotherhood, among the *Cadiz*' company, as became proper, fearnaught pirates; but, whether they wanted to believe or not, certain it was that Edward Davies held a sway over them which, even so far in the cruise, none knew the manner of its attainment.

Smiling in quiet triumph, Davies blew his whistle shrilly, and waited while every man save the helmsman tumbled up or down, from below or aloft, quitting tasks as well as pastimes, to gather about the leader they had learned to respect as pirates rarely respected any man.

Goliath took up a position near the captain, and upon his ebony visage sat an expression of blind devotion. Nell Clark assumed her favorite position in the skylight, standing on a cabin chair; and now, a rank deserter, Bravo the parrot perched on her shoulder, ruffling his feathers and leering with a sidewise red eye up at his master.

"Men, ye have to cast a vote afore we sail further," cried Davies with a searching glance over the crew.

Many a fat pirate started and looked at his fellow askance, for the abrupt announcement seemed to hint at default in some one. But Davies smiled amusedly, with nothing approaching guile in his eye, and proceeded:

"What ye have to vote on is, will ye fight for me with your necks in the noose before ye begin, or will ye rather fight as well while yet the rope is dangling before your eyes but not yet fitted?"

A silence ensued in which creaking masts and slatting gear made a riot like pistol-shots, and the thrum of the bow wave was music to be heard throughout the structure of the ship. Men peered questions into men's faces; dark brows contracted in doubt of the captain's meaning; for all pirates fought with the noose in view, and all pirates hated to have the rope dangled verbally.

Upon the uneasy silence volleyed Bravo, fluttering up from the skylight to sit swinging upon the footrope of the crossjack.

"John Cook took his hook—
He's hiding out on Avesl"

A laugh greeted the parrot's interruption, and Kestral stepped forward and spoke for the rest.

"Cappen, we ain't your l'arnin'," he said awkwardly, yet with a glitter in his eye which spoke well of his resolution. "Free and ekal, the Jolly Roger siggifies, and free and ekal we is, so to speak. Well we knows as we sails wi' a rope at throats; an' so do you, wi'out offense, cappen; and so do the woman as sails as a man.

"There ain't a man in the company as wants election so long as they knows what's in yer mind, cappen, so we all votes as you open the book and tells the plain tally of yer ideas afore we does a thing about it."

Davies leaped from the gun, drew himself erect, and faced the men with a satisfied smile. Bravo squawked and flew to his shoulder, and with one hand smoothing the bird's ruffled plumage, the captain launched upon a recital that had occupied his waking and sleeping thoughts for many days.

"Ye're speaking straight and manly, Kestral," he acknowledged. "So be it. I'll do the same, and mayhap we'll all come out o' the venture the better for it.

"Ye ask, or wonder, about the noose I spoke of. I mean this:

"Ye all know of the amnesty offered to free rovers since my Lord Vaughan stepped on the tail of the traitor Morgan. Had ye served any but John Cook ye had all enjoyed the pardon offered.

"As for me, I was lost in the jungle o' the Isthmus when the offer was made, so lacked

opportunity to accept it. I want that pardon, lads, for there's been nothing in my career under the Black Ensign to enamor me of the life.

"But the gold we lost by Lake Nicaragua was mine, is mine; and I'll recover it, by Satan. Not as pirate did I take it, but as a fighting commander of a fighting force in a belligerent country. Spain was and is at war with our homeland, lads, and from the enemy that gold was taken as spoils of war."

"An ally gave me cause to suspect him when 'twas lost mysteriously; that ally suspected me; but I remained seeking it until I was left without men or arms or transport, while that ally deserted me.

"Which was the traitor? I leave it to you. But enough. Reaching the coast, all but mad with thirst and weariness and fear o' the unknown lurking in swamp and jungle, I heard whispers of this venture of John Cook's, and his joining with the Frenchmen who deserted me to seek my lost booty. And I shall tell ye, my bold fellows, what's been done, and what's afoot wi' John Cook——"

"John Cook took his hook—
He's hiding out on Aves!

"Cr-raw-awwk!" screeched Bravo, and a wave of laughter broke the tense silence that had fallen while Davies was speaking. His face, however, was too grimly serious to encourage mirth; silence fell again when he warned the bird with a flicking finger and proceeded:

"When I asked ye awhile agone would ye fight for me with the rope fitted to y'r necks or with it still but a threat o' the future, I meant just this: I could not accept offer of pardon, so still Edward Davies sails as a known and threatened pirate; for well ye know Lord Vaughan but offered amnesty once, for a month 'twas, and thereafter began those pleasant little afternoons that ha' made his name so sweet to all good subjects ashore and so black to all good rovers afloat.

"By dozens he hangs 'em, in chains. And 'tis but justice, I dare say. But because 'tis justice, shall I creep to my lord on bended knees and plead for some of the same? Not I! And not you, either, says you!

"And so I came to the gist o' the matter. There are other ports than Jamaica; other governors than Vaughan. Time's a healer, too.

"Suppose ye follow John Cook? Ye'll be pirates still. Follow me, and we'll fight for our own legitimate booty, and another amnesty will be found, never fear——"

"Good enough, cappen; but 'tain't none too clear neither," objected Kestral, and many another seaman muttered in sympathy. "Why's there difference atween us follering you and us follering John Cook or Swan? Ain't we all pirates together? And will they gi' us softer rope, or will we hang less complete wi' Edward Davies than wi' John Cook?"

"Glad I am to answer ye, Kestral, and all the bold lads who question," replied Davies, smiling still, but with glittering eyes. "If ye hang, ye'll hang as juicily with me as with any other pirate. That's true.

"Question is, why need ye hang at all? Ha' ye done act o' piracy since ye entered my ship? Was the taking of the *Cadiz* piracy?

"I see ye blinking, Kestral! Use thy woolly wits, lad! She run us down, didn't she? And we're at war wi' Spain, ain't we? Then we took an enemy ship to pay us for our own that she sunk, didn't we? And since when has law been that a merchantman must surrender to an enemy's cruiser when attacked, if she has guts to fight? Didn't the cruiser fire into us? Who shall bring us to task about it?

"Here we are, peacefully plying our voyage to the west coast on private venture o' mine. Somewhere astern's John Cook—John Cook, who, frightened by Vaughan's decree upon laggard pirates, induced Swan to play hypocrite in England in order that he might get merchants to fit him out a ship or two to hunt the unrepentant rovers, meaning all the while to join issues with him and make this descent on Nicaragua for loot and my lost booty."

Davies paused, watching the effect of his speech on Kestral especially, for he alone seemed to waver. Goliath hung at Davies' elbow, licking his thick red lips as if hungry for a chance to convince the doubter with steel; but Davies preferred to use other methods. Kestral uttered a thought that appeared to find sympathy in many others.

"'Twas John Cook's sloops that put us all afloat in stout ships, cappen. 'Twas John Cook who planned the venture. 'Twas John Cook who——"

"'Twas John Cook who set the Dons upon us, on me and on the Frenchman, and

turned success into miserable failure and the destruction of a hundred bold fellows like yerself," Davies burst out fiercely, interrupting Kestral.

He saw his opening, and seized upon it.

"I tell ye, lads, John Cook means treachery to me this cruise as he planned treachery before. And 'tis my treasure we seek—mine and no other's. Did not Goliath here tell me that Cook means to take me by surprize and wipe me out once he casts hooks on my gold?

"And d'ye believe he'll spare you? I say, 'No!'

"He believes that I know where that booty lies. He's foolish. 'Tis the Frenchman who knows, if anybody knows; and that's nothing so sure as to swear on, neither.

"But this I know, and this I tell ye here, and for the last time: while Edward Davies lives, an's able to lift a hand, no man robs him of the means of quitting this hunted existence without a fight for't! Here is a ship stout enough, a crew bold enough, and a leader who will lead ye to fortune even against all the fleet John Cook and his bullies can gather against ye.

"And this I tell ye again: Follow me, and by fighting for your own ends against Swan and Cook and the rest you'll be forgiven much of the world's score against ye. Decide to join Cook as ye thought—by which ye'll force me to do the same, I freely grant ye—and we're all as black bits o' hangman's meat as ever shivered at rattle o' chains! Now talk wi' each other, and before the log's hove again let's ha' your voice on't."

Like one man, without hesitation, the men howled in answer:

"—— Cook! Huzza f'r Ned Davies!"

## XII

AS IF to mark the arrival at harmony in the human elements, the greater elements of Nature declined to let the *Cadiz* pass farther south without supplying a foretaste of what might be expected still farther south in the vicinity of the Horn. Before the Line was well crossed a wind that had faltered for days suddenly dropped altogether, and the ship lay throughout a full tally of watches rolling heavily on a glassy swell, her fabric too hot to bear the naked touch upon it, her crew fast arriving at that point where obedience becomes a myth unless enforced by sheer overmastery.

"Aloft with ye, Goliath, and see if ye can not raise me a wind," ordered Davies fretfully.

Even his calm nerve could be shaken by forced inaction at such a time. A gale of wind would be welcome; a fight a luxury; anything to keep his crew from wallowing like hogs about a rum-cask, breeding unrest and perhaps mutiny.

The giant black crawled aloft like a colossal ape, swarming up the mainroyal-pole clear to the truck before he paused for breath. There he hung motionless, indifferent to the giddy gyrations of his lofty perch, scanning the sea horizon minutely in the northern quarter.

Not until he had satisfied himself by long scrutiny did he reply to the impatient hail sent up from the deck; and then he only bawled a brief "All right, sar!" as he turned again and swept the rest of the horizon before descending.

"—— me, ye black monkey, are ye dumb?" demanded Davies when Goliath joined him.

"No, sar," grinned the black with a sidewise glance at Kestral in the waist, hobnobbing with a gang of rum-swilling ruffians noisier than the rest. "No, sar; Ah ain't dumb; but Ah sure wanted to be down yar wid yo', sar, afo' Ah hollered de news."

"Well, what? Loose that clapper o' thine, man!"

"Fust, dar's a ship to de nor'ad dat looks like he mought be a fight ship. He hab he boats out ahead, an' he p'intin' dis way——"

"Stand by, all hands!" roared Davies in swift alarm, and sprang to the mizzen rigging bent upon seeing for himself.

"No bodder, sar," Goliath grinned up at him. "Yo' eyes no see him dat far. 'Sides dar's a —— bustin' breeze ob wind a-cookin, up in de east, an'——"

Davies dropped out of the rigging, glancing at the black as at some queer monster of the sea.

"Kestral!" he shouted. "Get that hamper cleared off the decks and roll up the light canvas."

He gazed long and keenly to the eastward, and his experienced eye detected that faint haze creeping down out of the deep blue of the glassy sky like delicate spray from blue water; and he could see now momentarily how the haze, where it merged

into the horizon, grew darker and sharper of outline until the sea margin was ruled as with a metal ruler, and the sky that edged it was oily, slaty and ominous.

"That's no catspaw!" he muttered, and darted down to his cabin to peruse the chart.

There was plenty of sea-room, even if he had to run dead to leeward for two full days; his ship was sound, his crew ample, and not yet so drunk with idleness and liquor as to be incapable of swift action.

As for the ship Goliath reported, it was evident that her commander had either seen the *Cadiz* through eyes as sharp as the black's, and in that case she was surely a fighting ship with suspicions of him; or he was one of those fussy, ——-for-leather captains who keep the spirit of their men broken by hopeless labor at unnecessary tasks.

In either event that greasy-looking cloud formation to the eastward, coupled with the sullen flap of the high canvas while yet the sea lay like a mirror, and the air of brooding that now seemed to pervade the ocean, promised very soon to keep every man in both ships so full of anxiety for his own safety as to put aside all thoughts of chase or combat. He returned on deck with his course clearly outlined.

As he stepped out of the cabin doors, clamorous with the shouts of hauling seamen on deck and aloft, he heard a shrill oath in Nell Clark's voice and a deeper curse in a man's furious tone; and Kestral strode forward among his men with a hand clapped to his face, leaving a trail of red drops as he went.

"What now?" demanded Davies angrily.

Nell turned her crimson face away, and fumblingly replaced her knife in the sheath. Goliath was already half-way down the poop ladder in Kestral's wake, advancing with great strides, his long arms swaying nervously.

"Wait!" returned Nell swiftly. "Stop the black. 'Tis no time to make brawl or inquest. See yonder!"

It was true. The entire eastern quadrant of the ocean was rippling in white-crested wavelets under a wind that visibly burst from the leaning cloud of slaty hue above. A deep-breasted moan, as of an animal in agony, filled the air to the drowning of the shriller whine that stirred the rigging.

The great topsails and reefed courses filled with wind to the slamming of tack and clew; bunts thundered against the masts as the vagrant wind blew out and sped on. A seaman far out on the jibboom was lifted bodily on the inflated bags of the sail he was trying to gasket, and tossed overboard cursing like a true pirate. His mates, leaning low from the forechains, dragged him aboard with unfeeling laughter, not a man among them having the intelligence which gives self-confidence; every rascal would wait until the crack o' doom for something to be done in their behalf, and until the order came from the stern, unwontedly angry commander on the high poop, not even Kestral knew what to do.

Goliath might know. The giant black had proved his seamanship a score of times daily since the ship ran out by way of the Passage of les Saintes and gained the open ocean to eastward of the Caribbean. Thus was Davies' shrewdness exemplified.

So far from trouble did he deem himself and his affairs, that he was willing to venture all upon the loyalty of Nell Clark and of the colossal negro who worshiped her for some hidden reason concerned with that forlorn little maid captured by John Cook and freed by Edward Davies.

"SQUARE in mainyard!" he roared; and as men sprang to the braces he leaped aft to the wheel and motioned the helmsman to heave the helm up.

Not too soon the great yards came square; the one jib left hung listlessly in a calm made by the filled fore-canvas; the half-brailed crossjack filled and heeled the ship as she bore away until brails no longer drew through the blocks. The *Cadiz* halted in her turning from the wind, forced back by the after pressure. And now the windward sea rushed forward with a weight and voice not to be trifled with.

"Down, Nell! Into the cabin with you!" cried Davies imperatively; and to add insistence where none was needed he urged her into the companionway bodily.

The ship reeled under the terrific blast that now poured across her decks, and only one thing would serve—the addition of head pressure and the taking-off of after-pressure; both operations none too easy since the ship wallowed with lee-gunwales under water, unable to relieve herself of that griping crossjack pressure.

"Set the outer jib!" the order bellowed

forth; and as Goliath leaped into the weltering waist to obey the order himself, Davies drew his cutlass, sprang into the lee mizzen shrouds, and at imminent risk of being carried away by the sea deliberately slashed through the stout canvas of the crossjack, thereby liberating upon himself a second demon of thrashing sail, but also performing for the sorely pressed ship the action denied her by overtaxed gear.

The crossjack ripped with a report like a gunshot as the screaming tempest took in hand what the steel had started, and the after pressure was relieved at the moment when Goliath, far out on the soaring jib-boom, roared that the jib was loosed, and to hoist away on the halyards.

With the trimming of sail the *Cadiz* bore away and ran before the gale with seas boiling about her stem clear to the headboards. A glance to the northward Davies gave, half in fear of seeing that strange sail appear through the murk; then he steadied the helmsman on a safe course, noted the speed and hour, and left the deck to Kestral while he went below to seek Nell.

Kestral was the one irritating factor left in the ship; but one such as he was enough to breed all kinds of trouble if not checked at the outset. It had been Kestral who put the arguments into the men's mouths before they elected to follow Davies and let Cook go hang. Kestral had never showed by word or action that he had joined Davies in other than lip service; and Kestral now had started trouble with the one most troublesome element on board—Nell Clark.

And since he undoubtedly owed much to her hatred of Cook and her good-hearted attitude toward the girl of the brig, Davies, who had gained Goliath thereby, was resolved that if Nell chose to be rated a man in the company, a man she should remain, if he had aught to do with it.

## XIII

TWO full days the gale lived; and at the end of the second Davies awaited anxiously the report of Goliath, who had been sent with the sounding-rod to try the well; for the *Cadiz* was strained, or perhaps she had sustained injury in running down the white sloop which developed only in the stress of the storm. The pumps clanked mournfully, gushing forth volumes of clear water which spoke only too eloquently of the size of the leak.

"Five feet, cappen," announced Goliath, showing the jointed rod wet over its whole length. The line, too was wet.

"That's a foot worse, with pumps in constant play."

"Yassar," grinned Goliath; "an' dat wattar's clear. 'Tain't no little leak, dat ain't, cappen."

"Issue double rations of rum, and double that again if only ye keep the rogues pumping," snapped Davies. " 'Tis a plaguy bit o' coast lies ahead of us. Until I sight the pole star, or unless I hold off and on until sun meridian tomorrow, there is no running in to careen. —— me, but I fear we are even now in too close approach to the San Roque outer dangers.

"And that ship you sighted—she must have run too as we have! Daylight's wanted, Goliath. You must keep those pumps going if it costs ye lives."

" 'Tain't costin' no lives, cappen, lessen dat yar Kestral starts somet'ing. Ah t'ink he feelin' slack about de knees. He mutter all de time dat now's de time to quit de pirate life, wid stout ship under foot, widout waitin' ontil dat king's ship git him, or Cook either."

Davies set a mark against Kestral in his memory and waited impatiently for night. As soon as Polaris shone brightly enough to show in his crude instruments he took its altitude and from it secured a rough approximation of his latitude. The discovery that he was yet to the northward of San Roque and its dangers was pleasing, and if he had but means of determining his longitude he would gladly have trusted to the pumps awhile and taken a spell of much needed rest.

"We are on the latitude of Mossoro River, Kestral," he said to his first officer. "Set men at each masthead and tell 'em to look out keenly to the southward for loom of land or foam of breakers. 'Tis an evil coast, with tides and shoals and dangers untold."

The charts of the day were imperfect almost to distortion, and of all the manifold rocks and races that lie off the great Brazilian cape only the bold cape itself was shown in its true position. Dots and circles, symbols of mythical nature too, were scattered helter-skelter around the headland, but nothing was set down on the

parallel of the cape, and all known dangers lay to the south. Fortunate it was for the *Cadiz* that the wind had all but died after the gale, that the sea was calm and the night growing brighter hourly.

Two hours after Davies had got his latitude the lookout on the foremast yelled in fright:

"Breakers ahead! Breakers on th' starb'd hand!"

"Up helm! Up with it!" roared Davies, springing from the locker on which he lay and climbing into the mizzen rigging to look for himself.

The ship slowly swung off, and under the starlight, clearly from the deck, patches of silvery foam showed vividly along her starboard beam. Davies reached the mizzen-top. A glance told him the truth. The ship had found her way into the midst of a maze of shoals over which a dozen rocky heads were scattered like decaying teeth in the jaws of a menacing Triton.

"Kestral!" he bawled deckward. "Wear ship! Lay her head due south till I see clear water."

The ship's head turned lazily, still farther from the faint breeze. In the east a late half-moon peeped over the horizon as if in encouragement, and with the first silvery beams of its light came the hail of the lookout at the main-truck.

"Sail ho! Sail to th' no'th."

"Can ye make her out?" demanded Davies, his own elevation insufficient to reveal the sail to him.

"But poorly, cap'n. 'Tis a right square t'gallants'l, though, and shows up bravely in the moonlight like the canvas of a lofty ship."

Davies was already sliding down the mizzen stay. In a few minutes more he had mounted beside the lookout, and his own sharp eyes were reinforced by those of Goliath, who had swarmed to the fore-truck at the first hail.

"Dat's de same t'gallants I seen afore de breeze, cap'n," the negro bellowed. "Ah'd sw'ar to dat, sar. Nebber see no canvas as white an' squar' as dat 'cept on a king's ship, nudder."

Davies had not the vulture vision of the giant black, but in the gathering moonlight even he could catch the flash of the broad white sail astern to the northward, and after a few moments of concentrated effort he made out the distinguishing marks of a three-masted ship standing in for the land on the starboard tack. In a flash an idea came to him, and he started to climb down, calling to Kestral as he went:

"Strike t'gallants'l and tops'ls, handily. Take every rag off the ship."

Again on deck, with seamen cursing around him for giving them the unnecessary work on top of their untold hours of pumping, he explained to them in a manner which speedily put a stopper on their empty chatter.

"Yonder's a king's ship, lads. By her course she's bound for the Mossoro River either to careen or to catch us. D'ye want to have her bear down on us because ye reflect moonlight from yer lofty canvas as she does? Bear a hand and strip the ship. We'll broach a cask when ye have her stripped to poles."

"If ye dodder about out here she'll sink under us," growled Kestral.

He was not without hope that the king's ship might yet bear down, and then he would see what could be done for himself by making the *Cadiz* an easy capture.

"Might as well be sunk in fight as sink pumpin'," grumbled one of Kestral's cronies.

Davies added the fellow's name to the others he kept in his memory against a future reckoning; but outwardly he smiled, encouraging where he might have bullied.

" 'Tis early in the cruise to speak o' sinking, lads. Ye're weary and lacking sleep, I know well; but why talk at all of sinking? Come, there are other places to careen than the river yonder.

"Cook! Fetch beef and good rum on deck here. And haul out the drummer to fife us a tune. Blast my buckles! I believe not that my bold lads are white-livered.

"Cheer up, Kestral man. Show thy teeth like Goliath does. See the wide grin o' his, and try thy face at the like."

MUTTERING, but partly soothed, the half-dead pirates furled canvas and returned to their inevitable pumping, clank-clank-clank, cheering the monotony of it with pails of strong liquor and chunks of half-cooked salt beef. And just past midnight, when the lookouts were being relieved aloft and the northern horizon seemed hopefully clear, the *Cadiz* gently shivered throughout her fabric, jarred a trifle more harshly, then shivered again

and leaned over to one side in the least possible degree, but enough to bring Davies up from below as fully aware of the situation as if it had occurred in daylight with himself in command.

"Cast the lead, Goliath," he said quietly. "We're aground."

HE AGAIN mounted to the main-truck, noticing as he went that the pumps had stopped. To the north he looked first. There was no flash of sail now.

Ahead and to the south he detected no white flash of foam, but instead there lay an expanse of shallows that ran on and on and across, seemingly a vast acreage of sand and mudflats, until a darker loom ahead revealed the high mainland. Astern, to which direction he last turned, he caught the occasional gleam of surf, where lay the rocky outposts of the shallows.

Goliath accosted him as he regained the deck, lead-line in hand.

"T'ree fadom aft, cap'n; not more'n fadom an' a half under de bowsprit."

"And tide should be falling."

"It is, sar. Eben now, sence we teched, she's listin' furder."

"All right," snapped Davies, glancing around the sky for weather signs.

All seemed clear and promising of fine weather; the sea scarcely breathed, the breeze was the gentlest whisper, the arming in the lead showed fine sand and tiny shells, the least harmful bottom other than mud the ship could have struck upon. And as for security from prying ships, no mariner would peril his ship by venturing there if he had a voice in the matter. For the rest, nothing could be done toward getting the ship off until the tide began to rise; and the men were badly in need of sleep.

"Come, bullies," he shouted cheerily. "Here we are, and here we'll stay for twelve hours or so anyhow. Get me out an anchor from bow and stern, and all hands may wallow in sleep for two full watches. If the tide only proves to be of proper range, who knows but we may find and stop the leak here on the bar? Then we'll fool the king's ship like jolly lads loving a jape.

"Huzza, now! Out boats, Kestral! Goliath, swing me out the great bower anchor and overhaul full scope o' cable."

With fresh vim the pirates toiled at tasks ten times as hard as pumping, urged on by promise of real rest at last. Davies himself took a jollyboat and sounded all around the ship, finding speedily that the shallows were almost flat except at one point off the starboard bow. Here the tide had already uncovered a little knob of pebbly sand. and the rapidity of the tide's fall indicated the possibility of a considerable range in the depth of water.

"We'll carry out an anchor this side, too, bullies," he shouted, pulling back to the ship.

Kestral and Goliath together had sunk two anchors well spread on the deeper side, and the windlasses creaked as the cables came taut. A deep growl went up again at the prospect of more work. Davies stopped it with soft words.

"'Vast heaving on those cables, my bold lads," he cried. "I'll drive ye no more. It's to save ye toil I'm seeking. We'll lay out a hook on top of a knob I've found, and carry the hawser into the maintop.

"Do you, Goliath, bridle up those cables ye have aboard, and carry 'em also aloft, leading both ends down through leading blocks, one to the midship capstan, t'other to the for'ard windlass. But heave the ship upright, and she stays so while the water leaves her. Then jolly seamen as ye are ye'll see half our work's done for us, for mayhap the leak is to be gotten at without heaving her down. If so be we must heave her down, then, —— me, ain't we able to careen her to either side, as we need? Come, lads, another half-hour's brisk work and I'll ask no more o' ye."

At length, when the tide had fallen below the bends of the ship, the weary pirates slept, while the tireless captain and the giant negro paddled around the hull in the jollyboat seeking for the great leak. When an oar, used pole fashion, found the sand at half oar-depth, the sound of rushing water brought them toward the larboard bow in haste. Water poured from a yawning gap in the hull where a plank butt had parted from the fastenings entirely at one end.

"There! Pumping herself, the old girl is!" laughed the captain happily. "Now to hammock, Goliath. The lads must rouse out earlier than they expect, but I'll lose no more time now we have our work in sight."

"Ah specs dey'll growl mighty hard, cap'n," grinned the giant black, his crossed

eyes gleaming in the moonlight, while his white teeth shone like pearls.

"Growl they may, but work they must," rejoined Davies.

## XIV

WITH fires built in boats to boil the pitch for the seams, the pirates labored in watches day and night until the carpenter announced the leak repaired and the hull as sound as when she was launched. And no sign of the king's ship had appeared to cause uneasiness; the weather prevailed calm and bright; the tides were coming fuller every day as the old moon died and the days brought the new moon nearer. Only at the last day did the breeze show prospect of strengthening out of the northwest, and that was the cheering piece of luck that assured the seamen that their captain was right when he told them:

"The *padre* 'll tell ye it's the righteous as are the beloved o' the gods. Ye may well laugh at such fables. I tell ye 'tis the bold hearts and stout the gods send good luck to. See if I prove not right."

Now the breeze was coming fresh and strong, with a sea as yet unruffled, fair from the quarter that would drive them off the shallows when they hove in their cables, and carry them into the deep water beyond the ledge. True, it would also give the king's ship—if such indeed that stranger seen bound for the river proved to be—the weather gage of them and drive her out clear of danger too; but she was still a thing of conjecture, not visible, therefore not to be feared.

"Goliath, swing in all the boats save the long-boat," Davies ordered when the tide had reached the newly mended leak and the carpenter in the hold reported not one trickle coming in. "Leave that boat afloat with a stout crew handy, for we may have to underrun the windward anchor to get it, since we dare not heave the ship over it lest we strike harder in still shoaler water. We sail as soon as she floats."

The tide rose, and the cables twanged to the capstan's strain; the windward anchor came into the long-boat, and both were taken on board and every man who could find room at a handspike hove lustily on the offshore hawsers. And the ship remained fast.

"Spell ho!" roared Davies, impatiently watching the tide mark and fearful that the water had already ceased to rise. "Spell a moment and sup a can o' grog. Blast me, but ye're heaving like milk-fed landsmen! D'ye like the place so well we must stay in it then?"

A moment of rum-swigging, then again the capstan was walked around. The ship leaned gently to the pull, but her keel was fast; and when Davies knew, by the evidence of his own eyes, that the tide had turned and was falling, Goliath, aloft on the main-t'gallant-yard, bellowed down through cupped hands:

"Sail ho! Dar's a sliver o' sail in de nor'ard, cappen!"

"—— and blazes!" roared Davies, dashing his hat to the deck in rare temper. "Sing out as ye make out her character. Is it the bulldog, think ye?"

Goliath gave no answer for several minutes. Kestral, in surly obedience to orders, drove the men to sliding the starboard guns over to the larboard side to cant ship, and then manned the capstan again, striving against possibilities to move the ship. Then came Goliath's report.

"Dat ain't no ship, cappen, at all. Dat's a boat wid a reg'lar boat sail, an' she's a-comin' down de win' lak a streak ob light."

"Wither your long tongue!" Davies yelled back savagely. "Is it a boarding-party then? Can't ye give what ye know in few words?"

"Dat ain't no boardin'-party, less dar's a heap o' men layin' in de bottom ob de boat," replied Goliath in a drawling tone that irritated the captain almost beyond endurance.

He strode among the crew, bullying them to greater exertions until even they rebelled. And Goliath at last determined what the stranger was, and slid down the backstay with his news.

"Ah ain't sure 'bout hes face yet, cappen, but dat's one man alone in dat boat, an' he's boun' fo' board us. Ef Ah ain't losted ma eyesight lookin' into de sun, dat's a man as Ah've seen befo'. Soon he'll be close enough to see who he is."

Then with a glance over the side the black giant grinned:

"Dat ain't no use fo' bust dem men's backs, cappen. Tide's gone back a foot. Ain't goin' to float ontil night now. Only make dem fellers mad an' mutinous."

"The lazy swine!" swore Davies, stamping aft in disgust. "Let 'em mutiny. 'Twill give me cause to treat 'em as I want to at this minute. Keep you a lookout, and let me know when yonder boat draws close."

Davies paced the poop for a while, fast recovering his own level poise, for he had seen Nell on the high gallery beneath the big stern lantern, and wanted her to see none of his unwonted agitation. She knew nothing, any more than the rest, of the sleepless hours of the night which he had passed struggling with the problem of that war-ship to the north, which might appear out of the distance at any hour and catch him and his ship helpless and doomed.

When he felt master of himself, he walked right aft and called to Nell. He received no answer, and called louder. He was answered now from high above his head, and looking aloft saw Nell perched on the mizzentop.

"Ed Davies, that boat carries Steve Carr!" she cried.

HAD a bomb dropped from the skies among the pirate crew they could have been no more astonished or bewildered. From Davies down to the half-witted galley-boy every man sprang to the starboard rail to peer under shading hands at the boat now speeding shipward within a furlong. It drew into earshot, and the captain hailed peremptorily.

"No nigher wi' that boat! Douse sail and shout out for yourself."

"I'm Steve Carr, cappen. Your crew know me if you don't. I want to join ye, Cap'n Davies, and maybe I ha' some news of a king's ship that'll make me welcome if ye let me aboard."

Carr stood shakily in the boat, and those of the pirate crew who knew him best saw a change in the man which could come only from dire extremity. His eyes were sunken, and his face was wan and pale, while thirst was written in every crinkle of his dry lips.

Kestral stared at his erstwhile superior officer, and grinned with open gratification. Carr's sunken eyes glinted as he detected that solitary smirk of pleasure among the scores of commiserating glances bestowed upon him. It seemed to arouse in him some devil of memory, some dark spirit of resolve.

"I'm starving, cappen," he called out. "Five days wi'out drink, and a'most wi'out meat, and the sun shines hot along shore."

"Come aboard," Davies replied shortly, and Goliath hove a line for the boat to draw alongside.

Steve Carr drew a long breath as if relieved of a terrific weight, then swarmed up the tall ship's side laboriously. A seaman met him at the rail with a brimming hookpot of well-watered rum, and he drank it at a draft before moving from the spot. Then, turning to walk aft where Davies awaited him, he caught sight of Nell Clark, and his lean body straightened and his stride lengthened as if he wanted most to show well in her sight.

"Cockin' a chest won't fetch ye a smile from her, Steve," sneered Kestral, shoving forward beside Carr. "Nell's a officer's wench if she's anybody's—and I'm the officer now."

Far back in Steve Carr's memory was the election of Kestral to command of a sloop, while he, erstwhile chief lieutenant of John Cook, was destined to betrayal. He glared at the sneering face beside him, with the long, half-healed scar left lately by Nell's knife; and hunger, bodily weakness, sun-scorched skin and everything passed like a cloud and red fury possessed him. Like a beast, soundless, he flung himself at Kestral, and before a hand could stir to stop him sunk his fingers deep into Kestral's neck.

"Avast that!" roared Davies, running to the poop rail. "Part 'em, Goliath! —— me, but——"

"Dat ain't easy, cappen," growled the negro, dodging around the combatants, seeking a hold to pry them apart.

Kestral was groping for a knife; his face was darkening with strangulation.

"Then shoot Kestral. I'll hear Carr's news if it costs me a mate, by Satan!"

Davies started toward the snarling fighters; but Goliath was equal to the task once he saw an opening. Wrenching the knife from Kestral's ever weakening grasp, he forced his own huge body between the men, placed a great hand on each laboring chest, and heaved them apart, Kestral to stumble away muttering over the words that had vaguely come to his seething brain from Davies, Carr to approach the poop on tottering legs and deliver up his news. Raising his head, half afraid of the meeting, he thrilled with pleasurable

surprize; for both Nell Clark and Ed Davies were regarding him with friendly faces.

"So ye'd start proving that ye're worthy by murdering my mate, hey?" Davies accosted him. "We'll pass that for the while, Carr, till ye tell what of the cruiser. How is it ye're here, first of all? Cook left ye on Aves."

"Aye, may his soul hang wi' his body! And the king's ship came. 'Twas his plan when he started that bonfire. And she carried off me and Rando and Doggett, and fifty good lads from the sinking sloop as put back. The dog! Tried to drown 'em, that he did. And there was the weepy wench he wanted for himself, as Mistress Nell cheated him out of."

Carr grinned at Nell with a humor that seemed ghastly, coming as it did into a face already suffused with passion.

"And her father, and the men from the brig we last took. And all came into Port Royal, where the sand spit is avenued wid gibbets, each wi' a comrade o' the Jolly Roger swingin' aloft high and handsome."

"But what of the bulldog now?" put in Davies impatiently. "Here we are, a fine ship, high and dry for ten hours more yet, and ye prattle o' swinging pirates in Jamaica! Give's the meat o' thy yarn, man! The rest'll keep."

"Gettin' to it, cap'n. Ain't no good gettin' oneasy since ye can't stir, is there? Well, cuttin' it short to please ye, me and Doggett and Rando concludes we ain't much chance of ever gettin' even wi' John Cook if we swings in chains to a Port Royal gallus, so we turns king's evidence, we do, and offers to guide the king's ship to Cook's rondevoo.

"Oh, we was smart, but them king's lads was smarter! Couldn't see why three hangin's should be postponed, they said, when one of us would sarve the turn. So we pleads as one of us knowed about the sea rondevoo, another where we was to meet the Frenchman, and t'other where the fleet was to land their men on the West Coast. So they says all right, me lads, says they, we'll take ye all along and hang ye as we go if we find ye're lyin'. And by the horns o' Noah's cow 'twasn't no good judgment as saved us so far!

"Sure Rando carried 'em to the rondevoo, and we sighted a sail or two, but lost 'em by night, so the bulldog's cappen don't know yet whether Rando told truth or not. Anyhow he give him the benefit. Then twelve days ago, just afore the big breeze, we sighted ye again in a calm, and had boats out to tow arter ye when down come the gale. But that saved Doggett awhile; and then we has to run in to careen, leakin' four foot above the pumps in a watch, and passes this ship by night. Only that we was sinkin' fast the cappen meant to try for ye wi' boats, for he seen as ye were fast aground on one o' these heads and guessed ye'd have to wait ontil new moon for spring tides to float ye.

"But while we lay in Mossoro River, hove down, the officers has a big talk, and they decides to swing off Doggett and Rando anyhow, for the fools have started grumblin' among the men. I gets wind o' this, and helps them two to steal a boat and get clear.

"But then I hears from the cappen's stooard as I'm to be next, 'cos they ain't seen nothin' o' the big fleet we told 'em about. So I drops down a line five nights ago, found the boat the others had left when they bust into the jungle, and put to sea. I'm here, cappen, to join ye like a true man, if ye'll ha' me."

"But, Satan wither ye! What o' the cruiser?"

"She was to be ready to float off yesterday, cappen."

As if to prove Steve Carr no liar, the lookout aloft bawled down at that moment:

"Sail ho! Ship to the nor'ard, standin' east on larboard tack!"

## XV

THE *Cadiz* lay helpless as a sheer hulk before the menace of that distant cruiser, and the tide dropped steadily. The sun rose to meridian, sending down a sizzling heat that the freshening wind was powerless to alleviate; and men, already uneasy and weary of unusual labor, cast scowling glances aft at Davies and Nell, while they listened avidly to the barely cloaked counsel of the humiliated Kestral to seize the ship and deliver her up to the war-ship.

Steve Carr, cleansed and clothed, eating as he watched, stood beside Davies and told him all he knew of the cruiser's men and metal. The king's ship passed out to sea until it seemed as if she were leaving

those dangerous waters without bothering the stranded pirate.

"Think ye she believes us a wreck?" suggested Davies eagerly.

"Not she!" growled Carr. "Her cap'n ain't one o' that sort. He don't believe altogether about Swan's squadron, so he wouldn't ask for a squadron himself; but he believes this is John Cook's ship, and he'll stand off and on until he gets a good windward berth; then if ye don't sail out to him he'll send in his boats for ye."

Davies glared at Steve, and his dark eyes glittered.

"Croak on, ye scurvy crow o' bad omen!" he exclaimed. "Ye're a plaguy fine comrade to ship, Carr. —— me, but I think John Cook was right when he left ye on Aves! Ha' ye naught of cheer to cackle about, that ye must croak dismal forebodings every breath ye draw?"

"I'm but tellin' ye truth, cap'n," grumbled Carr. "Don't I know yonder ship? Ain't I been among her men? I'll serve ye but scurvily by tellin' ye lies. I'm wi' ye, hand and heart, cap'n, and so ye'll find when the pinch comes. An' 'twill come as soon as that bulldog gains her station. Give me office; all your men was my mates; they'll sarve under me better than wi' Kestral, the dog. Look at him now. That smells o' mischief, or I'm a squid."

Davies merely glowered along the main-deck, where knots of men stood chattering volubly in low tones while Kestral passed among them like an evil spirit. Nell remained aloft, where she had mounted again at the report of the cruiser, and with the clumsy telescope she had found in the great cabin tried to keep close track of the enemy.

"It looks like no fair cast o' the dice," muttered Davies presently. "Fight him? Yes, we'll fight if needs must, and beat him too, with a whisper o' luck. But, blast my buckles, don't that make me a pirate again? What o' the Nicaragua booty then? All seas will be traps, all ships o' war hounds to harry me."

"Y' ain't took th' pardon, have ye, cap'n?" put in Steve Carr, astonished at what he had heard. "Ain't ye bound to meet the Frenchman and Swan then? Ain't I to meet Cook, man to man, for a settlin' atween us, cap'n? D' ye mean to knuckle to the bulldog?"

For answer Davies sprang to sudden action. He called to Kestral and Goliath.

"Lads, here we must stick until night. Yonder's the king's merry men, bound after our hides. 'Twill serve us ill to let him pound us to splinters wi' his long pieces, and 'twill be as bad to let him send his boats in to take us, for Steve Carr says the cruiser carries twelvescore o' men.

"So while ye wait for tide to turn, rig me tackles up to windward, so that when we float ye may lose no time hauling up the starboard guns to trim ship again. Then ye may take a spell awhile, for we can do nothing more until the water has risen four feet.

"You, Goliath, take a dozen smart lads and cast adrift all gaskets, stoppin' the sails to the yards wi' ropeyarns. As soon as we see a sign o' yonder ship sending in boats, set the upper canvas whether we float or not. 'Twill give him to think we sail, and the boats will return for the ship herself to stand off to intercept us."

He turned to Nell as she leaped out of the rigging, and hooked his arm under her elbow.

"Come, Nell, we'll let no king's ship spoil our dinner. If Ed Davies' good luck holds we'll cheat his Majesty without a shot; but if fight we must, then —— me but we'll fight the better for full bellies."

From time to time the masthead lookouts hailed the deck with news of the cruiser's position. At mid-afternoon, when the tide was at its lowest ebb, the ship had passed out of sight, and the uneasy crew howled gleefully over their rum, less mindful now of Kestral and his counsels.

Steve Carr had taken up his quarters in the poop as if he belonged there; and, knowing him at least for a deadly foe of John Cook and no lover of Kestral, Davies let him stay, resolving to give him definite station after the coast was cleared. That Kestral lived by right in the same quarters swayed his decision not one whit; Davies did not trouble even to notice Kestral's obvious insubordination. He despised the man, and would deal with him adequately in good time. That he was a peril to himself Davies would not admit.

FOR different reasons the crew resigned themselves to the anxious waiting on the tide. Those with whom Kestral's voice had carried most weight looked forward to a fair chance of

escaping inevitable fate by delivering up the *Cadiz* to the cruiser; the rest enjoyed the relish of anticipating a fight in which their own metal was as heavy as the foe's, their own ship as fast or faster, and their numbers as nearly equal as to make small difference.

"If ye won't clap a stopper to the dog's tongue ye'll have him cuttin' yer throat yet, cap'n," growled Steve Carr toward late afternoon.

Kestral had carried out orders, and the guns that had been shifted to larboard to cant ship lay on that side still; but each was slung to a tackle high on the starboard side ready to be hauled over the moment the ship floated. Now Kestral sat on the heel of the bowsprit, surrounded by a crowd of attentive ruffians, holding forth upon a subject that seemed to grip attention in his audience.

"'Tis his own weasand that's likely to be slit," smiled Davies.

He had regained his balance entirely, and even the anxiety of long waiting without news of the king's ship failed again to ruffle him.

"Let him chatter, Steve," Davies continued. "If we win clear without a fight I'll deal with him my own fashion soon's we gain sea-room; if fight we must, then I'll leave him to you and Goliath to see he don't bite us in the rear. Hail Goliath for me now. Tell him to go aloft and use that vulture's vision o' his. I feel the lift o' the tide underfoot already, and no cruiser's in sight."

The ship lifted gradually until most of her list had righted. Only the weight of the double battery of guns seemed to hold her down when Goliath hailed the deck from the maintruck.

"Dar she comes, cap'n! De man-o'-war she standin' in t'wards dem outer reefs. Golly! Dar's a hull fleet ob ships 'way furder out to de eastward, sar, an' dat warship he go about ag'in in chase!"

Davies had given the order to set the topsails and t'gallants'ls on Goliath's first hail; now he bade the men wait. The negro shouted down presently: "Ah can't make out dem ships, cappen. Dar's 'bout five o' dem, an' dey sailin' mighty slow, seems to me. Ho, yis, surely! Cappen, dat fight ship he put 'bout ag'in, an' he standin' dis way fo' sho' now! He not bodder wid dem odder ship jes' yet. Ma Jumbo! Dat ship's a comin' dis time!"

The negro slid down the backstay like a giant ape, while Davies rapidly calculated distances and took keen cognizance of the rise of tide. At the elevation of the maintruck, with Goliath's keen eyes, that strange fleet might be distinguished at a little more than twenty miles. The cruiser, farther inshore, was perhaps fifteen miles distant; and fifteen miles also represented the radius of a circle, of which the *Cadiz* was the center, embracing close to its circumference all the dangerous rocky heads that side of the Cape.

Obviously the war-ship would not venture close in. She would very likely have eyes as keen as the negro's among her seasoned tars, and would stand in, using the lead, until she sighted the *Cadiz*, then back and fill outside the reefs until the quarry broke to sea.

"Set every sail above the courses, and heave taut on the cables," Davies ordered.

Nell came from the cabin, belted and armed, and brought his own extra weapons with others for Carr.

"What, art spoiling for fight, Nell?" laughed Davies.

"Not I," she replied quietly; "but I trust not the dog Kestral, and if fight there is I'll take care 'tis none of our own rascals I fall to. Steve Carr, once ye wanted to make me woman o' yours. I'm no man's woman, but I liked ye well. Take these arms, and if the pinch comes let's see what manner o' man thou art."

The great sails fell from the yards and were sheeted home. Their pressure bore down the ship until her ports were lipped by the sea. Immovable yet, her tacks and sheets, shrouds and stays cracked and squealed under the strain, until sheets were started perforce, and the pressure partly relieved.

And darkness fell, and the tide came up; a sliver of moon in the west was all of the new moon they might see that night, and in the east the horizon lay black and forbidding, hiding, they knew well, a bulldog with teeth to bite and heart to grip and hang on to the death.

What Davies miscalculated, however, was the caliber of the warship's commander. He was not unlike other pirates in that. Believing that no commander would dare to peril his ship among those wicked reefs, Davies had taken for granted a respite at least until he cleared the shoals himself.

Now with the ship beginning to bump gently and her head swinging every minute to the strain on her cables, with the men standing by to haul over the starboard battery to their places, and Davies and his mates peering over the side watching every inch of water rise, like a bolt from a blue sky came the flash and report of a carronade to seaward, and the twang and snap of a taut rope aloft parting to the singing caress of a solid shot.

As the loose end of the broken rope fell to the deck the *Cadiz* floated free and swung to her anchors.

## XVI

"SHE floats, cappen; she floats!" roared Goliath, lashing the men at the capstan with bitter remarks upon their strength.

Davies peered into the darkness whence came that shot, amazed and startled. He had but a faint notion as to the best way out of the labyrinth of shoals; with the shore to the westward and the cruiser to the east, with shoals to the northward and unknown waters south of him, the *Cadiz*' safety alone presented a problem to stagger a mariner.

"Heave away handsomely!" the skipper shouted. "Sheet home everything and let fall the courses! Carr, get men and haul over the guns, that we do not capsize."

"Shall I gi' her a dose o' iron?" yelled the gunner, squinting along a stern chaser toward where he guessed the cruiser was. His answer came in solid shape—the two linked balls of a vicious chain shot that took him between chin and shoulder and carried his head into the sweating gang at the capstan. And as the ghastly missile scattered red drops around, Kestral leaped on to the main hatch, swung a cutlas aloft and screamed in frenzy:

"Up, bullies! Here's yer ship. Take her, and gain yer pardon o' the king. Lay on, ye jolly dogs, and leave the wench to me."

Like a surging tide a full one-fourth of the crew of the *Cadiz* separated from the rest and rolled toward the poop. If Kestral had planned the outbreak to happen at that precise moment, it showed qualities of leadership in him of a high order; for Davies was caught aback, and the invisible cruiser sent another iron messenger athwart his decks before he could gather his wits. By that time Kestral and his mob were at the great stairway leading from maindeck to high poop, and Nell Clark, standing beside the skylight dome, knew this was the ruffian's way of repaying that knife-slash she had given him.

"Carr, take the forecastle. Call your men by name. Cut the cables and trim down yer head-sheets," snapped Davies, all his wits at work on the crisis while his arms were heavily employed beating back the storming mob behind Kestral. "Goliath! Aft to me here with what men ye know, and haul out the crossjack wi' speed! Nell! To the wheel! Hold her head at southeast till I teach this rabble something."

A pistol-shot blazed out almost in his face, and a bullet clipped the lobe of his ear. While yet the smoke hung at his chin, his own cutlas sang in an overhead sweep and cleft the assailant from crown to chine.

Then Kestral confronted him, blunderbuss pistol aimed, cutlas at the charge, and steel bit on steel.

Out of the dark night another cannon-shot belched, and the ball whistled across the deck, reaping a grim lane from forecastle to poop diagonally, entering at the foremost gunport to starboard, and smashing away the ornately carved dolphin that supported the larboard poop ladder.

The crash of splintering wood halted the mutineers for a breath, and in that moment a giant figure plunged through them with a crowd of huzzaing loyal seamen at his heels.

"All togerrer, boys!" bellowed Goliath.

He seized two rascals by the necks, one in each huge hand, cracked their heads together as he would crack two coconuts, and hurled them aside, reaching out for more. Blood flew in a shower under a fierce onslaught of steel, and Kestral backed down a step to stiffen his men, who gave way like the curs they were. None but curs, whether their ship was pirate or not, would have chosen such a moment to attack their officers.

That was the chance Davies had watched for. Reaching down a long, powerful arm, he gripped Kestral by the neckerchief and hoisted him bodily up to his own level. Then he crushed him in a hug that made bones crack and lungs pant and bade his quartermaster bind him with ropes.

"Ain't we goin' to bark back at th' bulldog?" yelled Carr from the forecastle.

The *Cadiz* was away from the ground, leaning to the freshening breeze and making

music at her forefoot. Except for the dangerous list from the guns, not yet hauled over to their proper places, she was as snugly under control as it was possible to get her in the midst of the reefs she had to navigate. Goliath and his men had effectually split up the followers of Kestral, as a modern policeman splits up a crowd, and only isolated knots of men still fought, snarling like wolves.

"I'll bark when 'tis time," cried Davies.

He was listening intently for sounds that would indicate the whereabouts of the king's ship, and fancied he heard the creaking of yards and the tumble of bow wave not far away; but the night had gone black when the shaving of silver moon dipped over the land, and the stars were coy. But he felt the swing of the sea underfoot, and only feared that other feeling which would apprise him of solid ground at the keel again.

"Into the chains wi' you, Carr!" he called. "Lee side. Sing out as often as y' can, lad.

"Goliath! Rig me up a tall mast in the jollyboat and hang a lanthorn on't. Bring it to the lee side, and light the lanthorn. Tumble Kestral and as many of his dogs as she'll hold into the boat, too. By the lord o' —— he wanted to take my ship to seek the king's pardon. I'll treat him handsomely, by the Great Horn Spoon—give him a craft o' his own, and let him go seek his own pardon."

THE great topsails flapped heavily.

"Keep her full, Nell. Full an' by, if she won't lie the course I gave ye. Rap full, lass—that's you!"

"I thought I made out white water ahead—" cried Nell sharply as she hove up the great wheel.

As she spoke the ship struck rock with a shudder, staggered, and plunged on as the great sails filled again.

"What says the lead, Carr?" yelled Davies. "What a plague's the matter wi' that lead?"

"New line; ain't marked," swore Carr with lurid embellishments concerning Spanish seamanship.

The plop of the lead was heard, and then the shout—

"No bottom at more'n ten fadom!"

The lead plopped down again; but Davies was taking chances, and waited for no more.

"How's she heading full and by, Nell?"

"Southeast by south."

"Steady as ye go then. Haste with that boat and gear, Goliath. What in the fiend's name's come o' the cruiser? D'ye see him, any o' yer? I'll give a fistful o' gold to the man as sights him."

"Ah'll seek him soon's dis yar party gits launched," said Goliath, lashing a big lanthorn to the top of a tall boat mast and lighting it.

Into the boat Kestral and a dozen of his misguided followers were pitched, some bound, the rest hurt in the scrimmage beyond any possibility of present action.

"Now turn 'em adrift!" chuckled Davies, and the light went sailing away astern as the fast moving ship thrust it off on her own broad lee wave.

The moment the light floated clear, far out in the windward darkness flashed the warship's gun again, and the shot could be heard whistling across the stern of the *Cadiz*.

"No bottom!" sang out Steve Carr, swinging his lead mechanically, holding no faith in the fear of more shallow waters, but very sincerely disgusted with Davies in that he had permitted his ship to be fired upon and hit, his men killed, with never a shot in retaliation.

"Why he ain't spread a tar-barrel flare abroad's more than I can fathom," Davies mused, joining Nell at the wheel and calling a seaman to relieve her.

"Ah'll soon tell ye whar she is, cappen, soon's she bangs off anudder gun," cried Goliath, already half-way up the main lower rigging.

To give him every assistance, apparently, the cruiser barked again, and now she registered a hit indeed, for the lanthorn astern leaped high in air, and went out like a snuffed candle, while the crash of the jollyboat's planking, and the howled imprecations and pleadings of Kestral and his men filled the air above the singing of canvas and cordage. Faintly down the wind came the sound of lusty cheering. At last the king's gunner had seen tangible evidence that their shots at a venture were on the target.

"Can ye make out how she heads?" Davies called aloft.

"No, sar. Dat gun was fired from de udder bow dat time."

Goliath was silent for a moment, while every ear aboard the *Cadiz* listened keenly for sounds to guide their understanding.

Then another shot crashed out, and it seemed more distant. Still the giant negro failed to pick out the ship from the enveloping night.

"No bottom!" sang out the leadsman again, and Goliath added:

"Ah cain't see de bulldog, sar, but nudder kin Ah see no broken wattar ahead or t' looard. 'Pears we done scrapped oveh dem reefs, cappen."

The king's men were puzzled, if their intermittent firing was any guide. The shot that had hit the boat carrying the lanthorn had evoked no reply, and if the mark they aimed at was indeed John Cook's pirate ship, as they believed, it was not like him calmly to endure a bombardment without reply. Soon Goliath was able to indicate beyond doubt the warship's exact position only a few seconds before it was clearly apparent to those on deck.

"Dar she lies!" he shouted. "Broad on de beam an' standin' in t'wards de reefs."

A great flare illumined the sea for acres around as a group of casks were set adrift from the warship containing sharp-flaming combustibles that shot a shaft of glaring light high in the air, to be reflected down upon the water revealingly. In the radiance the cruiser herself stood out a miniature of utter marine loveliness, her bellying sails and glossy hull gleaming where the firelight touched them, dark shadows only serving to accentuate their fairness. She too, like the *Cadiz*, was speeding through the sea with creaming forefoot; but between her and the reefs were black specks which could only be boats, all pulling in toward the spot where the wreck of the jollyboat floated, as if the ship had simply luffed up to drop them and resumed her course without losing a minute.

And the freshening wind blew strongly from the east; it had shifted from the north since the *Cadiz* floated; and the cruiser held a strong weather gage. The light revealed the wrecked boat and the flying *Cadiz* at the same instant, and from the king's ship a long piece belched round shot at the *Cadiz*, her courses were hauled up with the swift precision of a veteran crew of naval men, and her ponderous mainyard swung aback, bringing her to a stand. Davies watched her curiously, not able to understand her maneuvers.

"Now's yer time, cap'n!" yelled Steve Carr frantically. "She's struck, or some'at, I tell ye! Won't ye pepper her now ye ha' the offer?"

Davies laughed quietly. None knew better than he the motives which had caused him to endure peppering himself and make no retaliation on a ship of his Majesty. That pardon in the future should never be forfeited by fighting a king's ship, no matter in what other way it might be lost.

He watched intently, and saw the boats gather around the wreckage of the jollyboat, pick up what appeared to be men in the uncertain light of considerable distance, then pull fast toward the cruiser. The *Cadiz* held on her course, speeding through the water as if no such thing as unknown reefs were likely to exist in her way. From time to time Carr hove his lead and sang out monotonously—

"No bottom!"

Another shot came down from the cruiser, and fell short. Davies chuckled, for his ship was still speeding, and the foe was at a stand, picking up her boats.

"Hold her to a full and never shake her, and we'll show him our heels yet," he said, standing beside the helmsman.

The tar-barrel flare wavered and sank, to leap again in a final burst of flame. In its fierce dying gleams the cruiser's courses could be seen to fall, her mainyard to swing, and her sharp bows pointed straight for the *Cadiz* as the flare died away in blackness.

## XVII

NOT all the elements of discord passed out along with Kestral and his maimed boat's crew. His notion, and that of his followers, had been to escape what they feared must be inevitable disaster by yielding up Davies and his ship to the cruiser.

Now, a week after losing their dogged pursuer in the darkness of that night among the reefs, the *Cadiz* swam evenly along between doldrums and southeast trades in a speckless expanse of ocean, and her spacious decks were dotted with groups of idle men, many of whom held the contrary view to that of Kestral, and chafed under the ignominy, as they called it, of hauling down the black flag and sailing as an outwardly honest ship.

A few bold spirits, whose natural turbulence had been held in check by a wholesome regard for the reputation of Ed

Davies, had reached the point where that capable commander's authority must needs be backed by actions to last longer. These were the orators of the different groups; their insistent, oath-bespattered urging ever pointed to the simple operation of seizing the ship, casting adrift Davies and the big black Goliath if they survived the seizing, and keeping rendezvous with Cook and Swan.

"Ain't no proof as we've seen that this Davies knows so plaguy much," Bristol Jack was asserting.

He ever kept a wary eye upon the occupants of the high poop, for he still remembered seeing Kestral plucked from among his mates by one long arm reaching down from there. His trouble, and that of the men so ready to listen to him, was that they could not accept proof which fell short of striking them personally.

"Looks t' me like this Schoolmaster chap only keered about gettin' hisself a fine ship wi' the help o' John Cook's good men, then desarted th' fleet like a rat. We knows John Cook, lads. We knows he's a man o' guts, and he'll chance the gallus to bring us forchune."

"Right you be, Jack me lad!" growled his nearest auditor. "He'll charnce the blessed gallus, all right, for us! Ed Davies says, foller him an' there won't be no gallus, and a forchune jest the same. How about that?"

"Bristol's thinkin' more about hisself and how he's to get his hooks on to Mistress Nell than about us nor John Cook neither," exclaimed a broken-faced ruffian, thrusting forward his gaudily kerchiefed head and shaking a gnarled finger in Bristol Jack's angry face.

"The dog lies!" roared Jack, leaping to his feet and scattering his mates like skittles.

Some sprang up and backed him; others—they were about equally divided—ranged beside his challenger, and steel glinted in the hot sunlight. In the gleefully angry group side-quarrels bred, and before the chief actors crossed their long knives in earnest, blood flowed freely from smashed noses and split lips of a round half-dozen sympathizers.

"I'll have yer heart broiled for supper, ye bleedin' whelp," swore Bristol Jack, and his steel licked forward and still further marred the broken face of his foe.

"Ye'll lack tripes to stow it in then," was the fierce retort, and the cut was repaid with interest in a vicious upward lunge that all but disemboweled Bristol.

Both being bled so swiftly and deeply gave them caution. They settled down to a wary circling and dodging, silent now, grim and murderous.

On the poop Davies keenly watched the forward developments without seeming to do so. Nell Clark and Steve Carr, lounging at the mizzen rigging, exchanging rough and hearty cross-talk as any two pirates might, paused in their banter and glanced at the fight, then turned to see if Davies had seen it.

If he had he took no apparent notice. He strode back and forth along the weather side from wheel to ladder, hands thrust through his broad belt, his handsome face bright with well-being and easy mind. The ear-ringed, greasy-curled mariner at the helm heard the noise forward without being able to see the source, and his swarthy face was puckered in feverish eagerness as he snatched a questioning look at Davies.

"What, lad, art licking yer chops at smell o' fight?" smiled Davies, suddenly halting beside the helmsman and reading his mind, to that bold seaman's tremendous amazement.

His broken-fanged mouth gaped as he tried to speak, and Davies clapped him heartily on the back.

"Get thee along then," he said. "Carr, hold the helm awhile. A little blood-letting will do the dogs good."

"I'll holla for a hand o' the watch," retorted Carr, himself anxious to see the rapidly developing combat.

"Take the helm!"

There was no arguing against that tone. Steve grumblingly gripped the spokes, calling to Nell to tell him how the fight went.

"Bristol Jack's too long o' the arm," she told him indifferently.

"Is the dog getting th' upper hand then?"

Davies, standing at the ladder beside the swiveled falcon that pointed its muzzle along the deck on that side, suddenly found interest in the scene. Bristol Jack's adversary had stumbled to his knees, blood pouring from his neck, and barely recovered in time to avoid the finishing down stroke.

"BY SATAN, I'll see it!" yelled Steve Carr, leaving the helm and running forward. "Ye give a fo'mast jack liberty to see, and keep me, yer mate——"

"Take the helm!" rasped Davies, facing around and fixing Steve with a coldly bitter glance.

Steve obeyed, as many another good man had done. Davies stepped to the cabin companionway and called down for Goliath.

The black appeared in a minute, rubbing open his eyes, but otherwise as free from slumberous appearances as if he had never been abruptly awakened.

His ebon face glowed as he took in the crowd milling about the waist. The two parties had separated as the main fight grew intense, and their own petty scraps were shelved in the greater interest of the other. And what Davies was expecting was happening right there beneath his eyes.

"I feared it," he muttered, and he heard the big negro's breath whistling in eagerness.

"Dem lads is sp'ilin' fo' somethin', cappen," said Goliath intensely. "Lemme go down an'——"

"Stay here. See the mutinous whelps sidling over as one or t' other o' the knifers turns the tide o' fight? I've waited for a sign. And glad we can be it's come in fine weather instead o' down in the storms and cold o' Magellan."

"Ain't ye goin' to do nothin', cappen?" gasped Goliath with a hopeless stare and a slumping of shoulders. "Dem lads'll all be gittin' out o' hand ef ye don't show dem whar dey stands."

"Stopper that long tongue," smiled Davies gently.

Bristol Jack had leaped upon his foe like a cat, and his knife sank deep into the wellspring of life amid the roaring huzzas and down-flung headgear of four-score frenzied ruffians. Now there was a general movement from the side of the fallen man to that of Bristol Jack. The victor grinned crookedly; his own hurts were such that he needed rest sorely, and he sagged down upon the hatch while his cronies flocked to bring him hookpots filled with stout black rum.

"Soon we shall determine once and for all who are with us and who against," nodded Davies grimly.

He turned the falcon on its swivel until the muzzle was to hand.

"Draw me the charge," he told Goliath.

The negro drew out the wad, and two pounds of pistol balls poured into his big cupped hands.

"Now the inner wad."

That came out, and the black powder began to dribble from the muzzle of the gun.

"That's good. Now stuff back the wad loosely, and load in the bullets again. Wad all loosely, and then do likewise with the falcon on t' other ladder head and stand by wi' a match. Ye shall see what the dogs have murmured for all the voyage. They are complaining that Ed Davies got's reputation on mouth alone. Watch!"

Lighting a gun-match in the shelter of the companionway, Davies sent Nell to the helm and called Carr to his side. It was as well that all concerned should see how he dealt with rebellion when rebels became too plentiful and their uprisings too frequent.

"This will settle our business as a bolus settles a seasick stomach, Steve. Now look ye. D'ye see any man among yonder rabble who ye'd guarantee wi' yer own life to be for me?"

"Me?" grunted Carr contemptuously. "Wasn't every man Jack o' the scum ready an' willin' to see me left on Aves for the bulldog to snap up? Ain't they all ready at this minute to back that black-avised Bristol swab? If ye want to know their idees, ye have only to wait till Jack catches breath. Y'd ought to have dropped two or three boatloads more overboard when ye dumped Kestral."

"Right ye are, Steve," smiled Davies, nodding full agreement.

He glanced at Goliath. The negro stood like a massive ebony statue at his deck-raking swivel gun, blowing on the match with gentle respirations as placidly as he might blow on his hot grog to cool it. Davies suddenly uttered a shout, and the crowd clustering about Bristol Jack stood upright and stared aft, scowling blackly.

"Ye've had yer sport, lads, now I'm going to show ye some o' my sort," Davies yelled.

They stared at him uneasily; for gone was his calm, even smile; gone his air of indifference, nonchalance, carelessness. His face was set and terrible; his tall figure quivered, and the strong right hand that rested on the rail was white with the tenseness of his grip. Only the white gleam of his even teeth had the semblance of a smile, and it was frightful. His trumpet tones rang out again.

"I know ye purpose demanding proof o' me that my venture beats John Cook's for booty. I hear—the ship hums with it—complaint that Ed Davies is but a boaster, wi'out guts to back his boast. I've brought

ye out o' storm and peril o' hanging, and I give ye no more reasons. If ye're for me, over to larboard wi' ye. Quick, by Satan! I give scant grace."

"A pox on's braggart throat! Gi' him a dose o' musket balls," snarled Bristol Jack, his teeth clenched upon the end of a bandage as he bound up his forearm. "Stay where y' are till I bind these woundy slits up snug, and we'll see the color o' his blood."

Without a word further in warning or threat, Davies touched match to his falcon, and a hellish hail of leaden balls swept the huddled mob amidships. The men scattered like a chaff, a score of them hurled every way about the hatch, the rest glaring affrightedly at the man they had lately derided.

Davies had purposely lessened his powder-charges so that bullets which might otherwise surely kill might bruise and wound and with luck let live. At the other falcon Goliath stood silently grim, still puffing on his lighted match.

Bristol Jack sat where he was, his bandage dropped, his mouth open, a look of foolish astonishment on his evil face, doubly evil now by reason of a flap formed of half his scalp which a handful of bullets had made and plastered over one eye. The men were too bewildered to remember what Davies had said about taking the larboard side. At a gesture from his chief Goliath blew briskly on his match and approached the gun's touch-hole with it.

"Belay, cappen!" screamed Bristol Jack in frenzy. "Which side d'ye say?"

"Larboard."

The crew jostled each other in their anxiety to prove their loyalty. Davies laughed scornfully and turned away, never noticing, if he saw, the look of dawning admiration that crept into Steve Carr's face or the flash of pride that lighted the big dark eyes of Nell Clark.

"Go seize Bristol Jack, and hang him in bilboes at the fore yardarm," he told Goliath, and went below without bestowing another glance upon the subdued rabble in the waist.

## XVIII

IN THE cold seas between the Falkland Isles and the tip of the continent the *Cadiz* staggered heavily against the screaming westerly gale. Great gray seas hissed up to her bows, delivered their hammer blows and rolled in over her high bulwarks to snatch at the lives of her crew. Already blood, thinned by long weeks of tropic seas and warm breezes, proved useless to maintain warmth in shivering bodies; rum, unlimited and ever at hand, alone kept cowed men from giving up the struggle.

"Is the Cape o' Virgins true land or a bit o' mariner's fable?" grumbled Steve Carr, his eyes reddened and his face cracked through long peering into the storm for the Straits entrance. "If we raise not the land soon the dogs'll lay down and give up the ghost."

Davies laughed grimly. His own face was drawn and blue from exposure and short rations, for he had not spared himself.

"'Tis a real cape, Steve. Just beyond the horizon it lies. As for the rascals forward, 'twas well we showed 'em who was master before we entered these frozen devil's seas. I like not this bitter weather myself. A pirate may choose his climate, Steve, as no other seaman may do, and rarely will ye find him in such scurvy discomfort as this. Small blame to the lads.

"Give 'em rum, man; let 'em swim in it; and though they growl and curse and threaten they will work ship and talk only. They don't forget that falcon's bite!"

"And what o' meat?" cried Steve. "This ship was provisioned for two months when ye took her. Here we are, more than three months out, and the last cask o' beef is broached, the water stinks, and——"

"What a croaker it is!" laughed Davies though his eyes held a cold glitter. "Ha' ye heard aught o' complaining from Nell Clark? ——'s wounds! Ye're less of a man than the wench."

"We sighted the coast twelve days agone, and could ha' got meat beasts for th' huntin'."

"Aye, and lost yet more advantage to John Cook. I heard ye frothin' about the reckoning ye were to have wi' him, Steve."

"And reckon wi' me he shall, by Satan!" swore Carr fiercely. "What shall I gain toward a reckonin' if I starve along o' the lads because o' yer mad haste?"

Davies mastered the impulse to quiet Steve as he had quieted others. He hoped for much from the man's bitterness against John Cook when the event arrived. He licked the brine from his lips and bent his

head to a volley of chilly spray that pattered into the close-reefed main-course like small shot.

"I must tell ye yet again," he said patiently. " 'Tis a guess, but well ye know the guess is right, that the fleet we sighted from masthead when the bulldog was trying to corner us was the ships o' Swan and Cook. They were too far to windward, and we too handy in a trap, for the cruiser to do aught but stick to us.

"We broke clear, by luck, daring, and darkness, when our chances looked no better than if the rope was fitted to our necks fine and handy. Only the tar-barrel blaze dyin' at the moment, instead o' livin' ten minutes more, lent us the respite that won us free o' the reefs and his guns.

"There's not a bit o' doubt that when mornin' broke and he saw he'd lost us, the bulldog stood after them other ships, and unless they scattered to fool him they'll ha' lost no time to th' south'ard. If he caught up wi' one or more o' their slower ships he'll ha' been stayed long enough for the others to win clear. And neither Swan nor Cook are of a kidney to stand by comrades when there's division o' loot ahead.

"So whichever way the dice rolled for 'em, be sure they are not far astern of us unless they put in on the coast for meat and water."

"Ye preach like a blasted *padre!*" swore Steve irritably. "I'm in th' dark yet. Ha'n't we to put in for food and water too? What do we gain then? What can a starvin' crew do anyhow?"

"Never been through Magellan's Straits, ha' ye, Steve?" smiled Davies, still patient.

He shivered as a bitter blast screamed across the deck, bringing great flakes of snow that hung to the clothes like feathers.

"I never made the passage myself either; but I ha' spoken wi' them that have, and this I know: Let me enter the Straits ahead o' Swan's ships, and I'll sail into the Pacific wi' start of 'em, and full provisioned, too!

"Now, bid the lads take courage. A day or two at most, and they shall eat green herbs and red meat, and stretch their pegs on dry land for a spell."

Carr passed among the men, cheering them, though he felt small cheer himself. The *Cadiz* streamed freezing water from forecastle to stern lanterns; her heavy sails, close-reefed or furled, dripped icy drops that were gradually forming into glittering icicles. The 'tweendecks, the men's living-quarters, were one long, dark, stinking dungeon, walled and ceiled with moisture; the cooking-galley swashed knee deep in filthy slush that had long since extinguished the fires.

"Give us meat!" the men howled as Steve Carr descended among them. "Give us meat, Steve Carr. Can men live and work ship in such fiend's weather wi'out food?"

"Ye get no more meat today, lads," growled Steve without heat and without enthusiasm. "Ye broached the last cask this forenoon. If ye eat all today, tomorrow ye starve in good earnest."

"Then give us of the cabin stores! Ain't we all ekal? Be you and Davies and the big nigger and the wench lackin' grub to stretch yer bellies then?"

"What's Davies beatin' about here for?" demanded another. "Wi' this wind we can run to th' norrad and gain warmth o' sun and fresh meat in plenty."

"Davies eats no more than you scum o' the seas, nor do I, nor the wench, nor the nigger neither," retorted Steve. "We get ekal rations wi' all o' ye out o' yon cask o' stinkin' beef.

"As for reasons, why, me lads, go ask 'em of Ed Davies hisself, if ye ha' not had enough o' such askings. Only this do I know: We stand in for the Virgins, and 'tis but over the horizon now. Ed Davies sent me to tell ye ther's meat and green food, water and a stretch ashore, for all o' ye once we win into the Straits.

"Pull yer belts tighter and keep meat against tomorrow, lads. Ye'll see the land in mornin' light, but ye may be hungry enow afore ye kill meat for all that. Ye ha' lashin's o' good rum, or if ye like wine better the hold's full o' such sweet trash.

"I ha' no more to say but this: When ye feel like askin' Ed. Davies why he does such and such, why, he has a pleasant way o' showin' men his strength, that's all. Patience, bold lads, and be —— to ye."

IN THE noisome gloom of the 'tween decks the crew muttered sullenly. The reeking atmosphere was doubly stifling with the fumes of tobacco and the pungent tang of raw rum.

Overhead the seas thundered on the deck, making the hollow interior resound like a vast drum keeping rhythm to the shrieking song

of the tortured rigging. Hungry men licked their unshaven chops and glared at the flooded galley; the slaves who tended it strove frantically to clear scupper-holes and release the foul water before more came down the shattered hatchway and drowned them completely. Eyes glinted wolfishly at sight of the beef-cask, and with a noisy swallow of rum a bold spirit announced:

"Full an' plenty today an' be —— to tomorrow, lads! I'm fer makin' a proper meal, I am. What say ye all?"

"Ha' ye ever starved?" demanded a wizened little ruffian sneeringly.

"——'s mirth! Ain't I starvin' now?"

"Real starvin' I mean. When yer belly's slack trips yer knees, an' ye'd sell yer mother's soul to buy ye flesh, or kill her an' eat her yerself if ye lacked buyers. Ain't ye had as much rations as the rest o' the lads today?"

"Clap a stopper on thy babblin' kisser!" roared the malcontent savagely. " 'Tis all or none. What say, lads? Shall we eat full fare today and trust in Ed Davies' reckonin' for tomorrow? Didn't Steve Carr say th' land's close aboard?"

"Aye, but he may be guessin' again. Ha' any of us sailed these seas before, that any man may know where lies the land wi' surety?"

"That's the talk!" roared the prime mover in the proposed feast with fine disregard for the line of his own argument. "Do we know? Do Ed Davies know? Then let's fill our bellies while we ha' meat!"

A sudden yell pealed out on deck as the men paused. He cocked his ear, and a yellow-toothed grin broke out on his ugly face as the yell became coherent and penetrated clearly to the huddled wretches below.

"Land! Land ho!"

Up they poured, heedless alike of cold and driving spray, staggering deck and crashing seas, to climb on to midship house and forecastle, into the rigging and upon guns, every frowning face peering into the snowy murk ahead and to windward.

"Where away?" growled one.

A pair of eyes sharper than the rest picked out a blacker wave than its fellows, a wave that stayed up against the slaty sky when the others went roaring down to sea-level or passed beyond the ship to the farther horizon.

"There' she looms—broad on th' larboard bow!" shrieked Steve Carr from the high elevation of the mizzen-top.

"That's a woundy big sea, fool!" screamed the wizened little pirate who had counseled patience below.

" 'Tis no sea, lads, but the Virgins!" shouted Davies in jubilation. "Hang on awhile like stout lads, and I'll ha' ye in snug harbor before many glasses ha' run."

The *Cadiz* stood on, carrying the same tack, for with the next she would head in fair for the Straits entrance did the wind but hold. On deck Davies kept only the few men needed for helm and sand-glass, with lookouts on each lower yard; the rest of the hungry, shivering crew poured back through the hatchway to huddle again in the filthy reek of their quarters.

"Now, bold rovers, will ye argue ag'in' feastin' our bellies now?" demanded the ravenous one uproariously.

Even the wizened little pirate was silent. The galley slaves were ordered with curdling oaths to boil beef, and to keep tight lips about it on peril of their bodies and souls.

## XIX

A SNOW-SQUALL that blotted out the land developed into a screaming storm that blew the *Cadiz* far offshore again and lasted a full week. And at the end of seven days a battered ship manned by gaunt, hollow-eyed specters once more fought her stubborn way in toward the Virgin Cape.

"If I haven't lost every bit o' luck I ever had, ye'll pick up the Cape at dawn, Steve," rasped Davies after making up his reckoning. "How goes the larder? Mistress Nell's looking ghostlike, but never a whimper will she make."

"I had th' last bit o' green hide chafing-gear stripped today," growled Steve Carr sullenly. " 'Tis a scurvy diet. Boiled rawhide for a week on end, by satan! And none too much o' that either. —— me, but had I been master o' the ship I'd ha' made yonder scum go short for their fault."

"Aye, and so should they, had there been aught of advantage in it. For my part I'm more than satisfied wi' the bit o' rations I get. By chewing all day I manage to swallow the mess before turning in to sleep. How Nell contrives is more than I can guess.

"'Twill be yet another lesson to the dogs. By the time I raise the Frenchman's topsails I'll have a crew who'll do as I tell 'em and never dare to question. Patience."

"Patience! Seems to me y' ask a woundy deal o' patience from all hands," retorted Steve. "Y' expect too much o' common men as ha' none o' yer own stoutness o' guts, Ed Davies. Some o' that harshness ye raised yer reputation upon might well serve ye better than preaching ever patience."

"What maggot's gnawing at ye now?" cried Davies, suddenly aware that his chief lieutenant had some deeper motive for his grumble than appeared outwardly. "Has any man merited harshness greater than all are suffering?"

"Aye, and the very rogue who bullied his mates into scoffing up their meat the day we raised the Virgin. The men curse, but he has 'em tamed, by Satan! Never did I see bold sea rovers so cowed. It's this bitter cold, more than empty bellies. Men used to warm seas and soft Trade winds ain't able to stomach this sort o' stuff. Ain't it drove Goliath under blankets?"

"Goliath was bred in Africa's scorching sands. Leave him out o' the argument. He'll still be worth a dozen o' the rest when the sun shines again. What's the trouble below?"

"The strips o' green hide. I portioned all out, no man getting more than another, not even the wench. And the men say their rations grow less afore they get 'em back from the cook-pots."

"They should watch the galley-boys."

"They do, and none save the arch rogue o' them all dare say aught against the lads. 'Tis— There, hark!"

From the open main hatchway, rising high above the squealing of timbers and creaking of straining spars, came yells, oaths, and the clash of steel. Ed Davies sprang from the poop, reached the hatch in bounding leaps, and landed in the dark, fetid 'tweendecks with flaming eyes.

His appearance caused no commotion, for the whole of the crew below were crouching, beastlike, around a savage knife combat between the wizened little pirate and Badoes, the Jamaican. With one long stride he stepped in between the combatants, and as coolly as if he were stopping a boyish game of fisticuffs seized both men by the knife-hand.

"Belay!" he ordered with cold ferocity. "What means this? Speak up."

A score of hoarse voices shouted at once. Davies raised his own voice above the rest.

"One o' ye speak. Stow this parrot racket, the rest o' ye. Quick, unless ye want me to show ye again who commands."

"The dog's stolen food, screamed the wizened little man.

"He lies!" roared Badoes.

"He does not!" came the denial from a dark corner, whence presently stumbled a haggard seaman, bearing in his hands some scraps of raw leather. "See, 'tis from Badoes' own hammock."

Suddenly fearful, Badoes twisted free and crouched low, menacing those about him with his steel. Letting go of the other man, Davies advanced slowly but resistlessly, his eyes fixed full upon Badoes, and with an amazing turn of speed enwrapped the man in his own long arms and held him.

"Take his knife," ordered the captain. "And lash the rogue with small cord. Now speak up, and let's settle this. If the man has stolen, he dies."

"What? Dies for a bit o' leather?" jeered Badoes in desperate scorn. "Who will be executioner o' such a decree, Ed Davies? None o' these bold lads, I'll warrant ye."

"Speak up," said Davies, ignoring the man's outburst.

"He stole into the galley and cut a bit from every man's strip," accused the little man.

"Dat's what he done, sar, 'cos I seen him," whimpered one of the galley negroes.

"Lies! Black lies!" yelled the culprit.

"Didn't I find them bits in his hammock?" came back his first accuser. "Ain't we all short-rationed enough as 'tis, and all along of his own holler for a feast, stid o' goin' slow until we made into the Straits?"

"What d'ye say, Badoes?" snapped Davies.

"Say?" jeered the thief impudently. "What d'ye want me to say? S'pose I did snip a bit o' leather, ain't it every man f'r hisself when rations is scarce? Why ain't ye took the ship in for provisionin' afore this, hey? 'Tis fault o' yours, Ed Davies, as we have naught but greenhide to eat, and none o' the lads below decks here believes as you and Carr and the nigger and the wench is eatin' such muck."

"Ha' ye done?"

"Done? Blarst yer soul, what more? D'ye think ye can tie me up this way and

speak o' punishment then? I calls all hands to witness as the rules o' the Black Flag calls fer a vote when a fault consarns all hands, and so I tell ye!"

"I ha' no knowledge of Black Flags," smiled Davies. "This is a private ship on private venture, and the lads are honest tars, if so they want to be. No vote will be taken for you, Badoes. Ye've stolen food when all hands, even the woman aft, is content to starve and hold on to the bitter end. Men!"

He stepped to the ladder and his voice rang out like a trumpet. "Men! Haul the villain on deck and hang him to the yardarm opposite to Bristol Jack's bones. By Satan, little by little ye shall have the scum skimmed from ye. None but true-blue lads shall share in the fruits o' this voyage, for none other can stand the bitter days. Up wi' him."

ONCE more, as if the gods were fighting on the side of Ed Davies in his voyage of vengeance against L'Escuyler, before the corpse of Badoes had well stopped kicking, the lookout aloft yelled with all the power of his weakened throat:

"Land ho! High land ahead!"

"'Tis the Virgin again, lads!" cried Davies, and ran to the great cabin to bring up Nell Clark to see the gladdening sight.

Nell appeared pale and hollow-eyed, but her figure was straight; her lips held nothing of weakness in their red lines. Her eyes, even though they shone out of hollows that held dark shadows, glittered with indomitable spirit.

And behind her came Goliath, his ebony skin turned ashen in hue, his giant frame bent and pitiable, his tree-like limbs tottering. But there was fire in his great black eyes too. Only the bitterness of those far southern seas in July had proved too much for body and blood of him; nothing of physical suffering could quench his courage, and it had been Davies himself who insisted that both the negro and Nell remain in the comparative comfort of the cabins while the ship fought against frozen Fate.

"Ye're too stout a pair o' comrades to sacrifice to Jack Frost and Davy's chill seas," he told them.

Now they could stand beside him, starved, bruised, weary of it all, but in sight of that which would speedily make them fit comrades indeed for the man who could so far forget himself in thought of others. And the wintry sun came out, lighting up the frowning Virgin and revealing the wide expanse of the Straits entrance.

Once inside, the land rolled low and flat on both sides until the Straits drew together at the First Narrows. Then, when he would have anchored, the tide-race caught the *Cadiz* and swept her within the funnel-like channel on the breast of a seven-knot current, forcing Davies to turn a deaf ear to the mutterings of the men whose mouths watered at sight of green earth and wheeling birds.

In what is now known as Gregory Bay the ship finally let go her anchor, and every boat not already battered by the seas beyond floating dropped into the water. Armed with cutlas, ax, knife, musket, trundling water-casks and carrying cords and handspikes, the crew tumbled into the boats and rowed ashore bawling hoarse songs of jubilation. Not even a ship-keeper remained on board.

"No shore people have appeared," Davies remarked. "If any come to view, why, ain't we able to take care of 'em? Look at the lads, Nell. D'ye think anything in human form will drive 'em from meat?"

The shores, rarely visited then, swarmed with penguins, great hares and ungainly guanacos whose lack of beauty could not blind hungry men to the generous covering of flesh on their bones. In twenty minutes from the moment of landing a score of fires were blazing fiercely, twice as many blood-smeared hunters were flaying meat, others plucked fat birds, while some there were, rendered bestial by extremity, who gnawed raw flesh until the blood covered them from whiskers to toes in a ghastly red mess.

"Make it a feast while ye may, lads," Davies cried, going among the men and praising them for virtues they never possessed, like the leader of men he was. "This is an evil place to be caught in, and once ye quit it ye'll carry straight on to the Pacific Sea. Fill yer kites wi' meat and rum; then there's work for ye that'll last well into the night. Keep fires burning, and pile 'em high with smoke-wood. Flay and smoke me as many o' the big birds as ye can catch; and treat yonder queer beasts that look like bastard camels by buck-deer sires as ye'd treat good beef.

Joint it, and clap it into the pickle soon's ye win aboard again."

Through the night the crew toiled over the fires. At dusk a party of Indians crept cautiously down to the beach, wondering at the intrusion. They crept back with terrible tales of leaping, bawling, blood-smeared creatures dancing among heaps of red flesh in the light of the flames; devils surely, and of a devil ship.

AT DAWN Davies ordered all hands on board, for the little that was known of the Straits warned him inevitably of perilous changes and vagaries of weather. Already, coming up on the heels of the pale sun, an ominous bank of white cloud seemed about to spring out of the eastern horizon and overcast the sky.

The anchor came up to a cheery shout that told of men full fed and forgetful of the past hardships. Topsails fell and were sheeted home; the great yards went up with a right good-will, and out of sheer jubilation Davies fired a gun.

Like an echo back came a muffled report from the Narrows. Men glanced aft at Davies; his head was cocked sidewise in doubt.

"'Twas the echo," Carr decided aloud.

"No, sar; dat ain't no echo; dat's anudder gun," asserted Goliath.

"Look at the fog!" cried Nell, shivering at sight of the white cloud that now had mounted until it lipped the lower limb of the sun.

Another gunshot came down the wind, and another. Then a short, sharp cannonade followed, and in the vague recesses of the Narrows a ship appeared, then a second, and they were firing into each other bravely enough. The fog crept down between the shores of the Narrows, blotting out the ships but not the sound of cannon-fire.

"'Tis Cook of a surety," mused Davies. "None other is likely to venture the Straits at this time. Who is the other? Is it that scurvy bulldog again, or have Swan and Cook fallen out so soon? What say you, Goliath? Did your sharp eyes detect aught to tell us?"

"Dat Cook's ship fo' sure, cappen. Leastways she's a Spaniard an' a gun ship, an' 'tain't gwine to be no udder Spainer in dese yar seas I reckon."

"But the other?"

"Ah only knows dat's a stranger, sar. Mought be Swan, all de same. Ah nebber see dat man nor his ship nudder. Don't make no diff'runce dat I see."

"Not much, with that peasoup fog rollin' in through the gut o' the Narrows! Up wi' you, and soon's ye get yer head above the heavy mist sing out how bears the Straits as far as ye can see. A mariner who'd sailed the Straits told me that once ye made through the Second Narrows Elizabeth Island loomed up, and then there's nigh to eighty mile o' good straight sailing due south, where all that's to do is to keep the lead a-swingin' out o' both sides."

"Dat's blin' man's nabbigation, sar," grumbled Goliath, mounting into the rigging with less than his usual alacrity. "De debbil lib not far frum hyar, so I been told."

"Might as well sail blind as seeing, if that's so," laughed Davies. "Anyhow, 'tis blind navigation even in daylight unless a man's passed through before. Sing out, man, and come down grinning again. Moses! Look at that fog!"

Rolling along after them like a tangible thing, the gray fog filled the Straits, covered the sea and wreathed up and around the lower masts of the ship. Out of the heart of it boomed a single gun, like a gun of distress, again and again; then silence until Goliath bellowed down from his perch—

"Cl'ar watter fo' 'bout a mile; den de island, sar!"

## XX

THE fog dispersed before Cape Froward thrust out its forbidding head. Thereafter passed thirty bitter days, days of biting sleet and shrieking blasts, of snowflakes thick as goose-feathers that filled the deep waist of the ship and froze into a solid mass before cursing seamen could clear it; days of endless rain that streamed from yards and sails, solidifying into glittering Damoclean icicles; and, worst of all, days of crashing thunder and blinding lightning that came down upon the wings of the southerly gale and brought the additional terrors of whirling snow and bullet-like hail.

But men well fed and of growing faith in their commander battled stoutly against the elements of Nature, and the *Cadiz* won out past grim Pillar's twin spires into

the vast Pacific with hearty spirits below deck and rising hopes aft.

"Whatever 'twas pitched iron into John Cook, sure 'tis neither has passed us now," laughed Davies, watching astern where lay the Straits' entrance. "I'd like well to be sure whether 'twas the bulldog, or Swan, or other ship."

" 'Twould be a shame if 'twere Cook's finish," cried Nell Clark fiercely.

She had recovered from the effects of those cruel days beyond the Straits, and glowed with ruddy health again. Her fine eyes snapped as she half-drew a long knife and slammed it back into the scabbard to emphasize her words.

"There's a long score against John. Steve Carr says he wants to see the color o' his liver. I'll see what sort o' poison runs in's veins for blood. And you—you don't love him, do you, Ed Davies?"

"Not much, since he let fall that he meant to hog all my booty for his own if he found it."

Davies smiled grimly as he recalled how first of all it had been John Cook who had given out the word that had set the hunters on his trail during that terrible Nicaraguan retreat; how secondly it had been only through hearing of Cook's proposed venture and daring to join in it without asking by-your-leave of Cook that he had secured ship and men for his own voyage against L'Escuyler; and how at length Cook and Swan together meant to sail under the cloak of honesty, protected by the men whom Swan had deceived into fitting out his ships at home to hunt down pirates, and band together against the Frenchman and Ed Davies after the Nicaraguan towns had been sacked and the lost booty of the lake found.

And Ed Davies loathed with all his steel-true freebooter's heart the sort of pirate who, like Swan and John Cook, pretended repentance in order to gain strength against erstwhile comrades.

As for his feelings against the Frenchman he regarded his former companion as a legitimate, open enemy. He was by no means sure that L'Escuyler had stolen their mutual booty on that night beside the great lake; in fact he believed that he had not, else why the need for this other voyage, unless as a clever blind and bait to get help from other rovers in an ambitious descent upon the west-coast cities?

But one thing he knew, which was that the Frenchman had accused him, Ned Davies, of spiriting away that golden treasure, and that sufficed to bring to a boil all the bitterness acquired during that awful march to the gulf coast.

Besides, the Frenchman had boasted that the secret was his, thereby gaining the help of Cook and Swan.

"What tickles ye so ye laugh so shakily?" demanded Nell, piqued at his silence.

"The whimsy struck me, Nell, that an honest mariner may ha' sport as well as a rogue o' the Black Flag, what o' my reckoning wi' the Frenchman and John Cook's promised reckoning wi' me over the wench we robbed him of."

"That was but the beginning of my reckoning with him," returned Nell sharply, and dodged aside in alarm as a tumbled bit of feathered life swooped out of the companionway and settled on her shoulder.

"John Cook took his hook;
He's hidin' out on Aves!"

screamed Bravo, making his first appearance since the snow began to fall.

The bird's advent proved the forerunner of mild weather with a kindly southwesterly half-gale that drove the ship booming up the coast, daily and hourly winning into warmer seas and bringing bluer skies. Never a gleam of canvas astern or flash of topsail ahead marred the unbroken plain of ocean. The *Cadiz* was in truth a solitary ship upon a lonely sea.

From time to time Davies ran in to sight the coast, and the frowning, bleak cliffs sent a shiver through the nerves of men who had been told that this vast western ocean was a region of pleasant groves and golden beaches, of rich Spanish cities and wine-laden ships, of dark-eyed wenches who freely loved the salty sons of the sea.

Davies secured a good verification of position one noon on the latitude of Callao, and thereafter alert watch was kept, for hereabouts John Cook and Swan were to cruise in wait for the Frenchman.

Those were the days before the chronometer made navigation easy. L'Escuyler would do the same as the others—sail north until he made the parallel sought, then run it down, eastward, to his desired landfall. So at any hour, once upon that latitude, the ships hurrying to the rendezvous might fall in with each other.

"WILL ye take 'em as they come, one by one?" asked Nell, keenly scanning the eager face of Davies as he awaited Goliath's hail from aloft. "These be warm days and pleasant seas, Ed, and the blood leaps madly at thought of meeting John Cook."

Davies laughed aloud, amused at the woman's warmth. He knew quite well that no affection caused that warmth.

"I hope 'twill be the Frenchman we raise first," he said.

"What? Afraid o' Cook, then?"

"Not I! But hast forgotten the manner of our parting?"

"It matters little, then, when ye meet him. Ye'll both fly at t'other's throat at sight. Best seek him and ha' done wi' it."

"In my own good time, Nell," Davies smiled quietly. "My first aim, the matter o' my dreams this year past, is to lay my hands on that vanished gold; after that, to prove on the Frenchman's front teeth that he's a traitor.

"There's no stopping Cook from coming in. There never was a chance o't, if I was to make use of him to set myself afloat wi' ship and crew. But that's no reason why I should seek to have Steve Carr and you shot or knifed by the dog because neither of ye has patience to hold fingers off his throat at sight."

"Well ye know John Cook dare not face me with the steel," cried Nell angrily. "If ye think so, clap us alongside——"

"Hoity-toity," chuckled Davies gleefully. "What a spitfire it is now Jack Frost's kicked overboard! Don't I know the lioness ye are, Nell? Steve may get his tripes ripped by John; I doubt not that he will, for he's too hot-brained to have craft o' wrist; but Nell Clark will surely find cunning to match her skill if ever it comes to knifework wi' her enemy.

"Two reasons, then, comrade, why I want no traffic along o' Cook yet awhile. Steve Carr's a good mate when he's led; and Nell Clark's too stout a fighter to risk in squabbling. Let's seek L'Escuyler first, or sail on for San Juan del Sur alone."

"Why not sail on alone anyhow? Are we not strong enough to penetrate the country then?"

"That is the answer, Nell. 'Tis a plague-ridden land; a land o' sweating plain and heart-breaking rises; of jungle thick as kelp in the Straits, of thirst and venomous serpents; of Spanish soldiery and lurking Indians. Let us first recover that treasure, even though we must outwardly join our enemies to do it. I know full well that they mean treachery toward me; but, knowing it, I fear it no more than I fear either Cook or L'Escuyler man to man.

" 'Twill be a good stroke, it seems, for us to fall in wi' the Frenchman first, and make him conciliatory approaches. Then when John Cook heaves in sight he dare not show hostility toward me until he gains the ear o' L'Escuyler in private and has chance to change the order o' things.

"It may well be that the Frenchman lacks strength himself. Then, knowing he has both Swan and Cook to cope with, and a squadron to boot, he won't flout me and my stout vessel wi' guns and roaring good lads."

Nell nodded full agreement, for she knew that Davies had weighed all costs before venturing alone into the retreat of Cook on Aves. He knew the land they were bound to, and moreover was a man at whom the finger of question had never been pointed in a matter of courage or hardihood.

She perched upon the great skylight with the parrot on her shoulder, and gazed aloft at Goliath on the main topgallant-yard. She too was impatient for his hail.

"Below, dar!" Goliath shouted at last.

Davies answered.

"Dar's a mighty queer-lookin' tawps'l to de west'ard, cappen," roared the negro. "Dat ain't lak nuttin' Ah ebber seen afore, 'cept on a Frenchman. Dat tawps'l she twice as long in de h'ist as ourn——"

"It's L'Escuyler!" cried Davies. "How's she heading, Goliath?"

"She headin' east, an' a comin', sar."

"Lay down from aloft," Davies ordered, and, conning the course, laid his own ship's head straight for the stranger.

In an hour the ships were in plain sight of each other, and from the Frenchman's maintruck a broad black flag broke out. It was answered with the red flag made fashionable among the brotherhood of pirates by Morgan, and in half an hour more Davies had spoken with L'Escuyler as the ships lay broadside on and close to, with backed yards.

Like watchful cats each saw in the other's gunports the fire of matches; on deck captain spoke fair to captain, while the gallantry of the Frenchman was not proof against

the battery of Nell Clark's eyes, roguishly glancing at him from beneath her broad-brimmed, plumed hat of occasion. His own eyes opened wide when she sprang up on the high rail beside Ed Davies, and revealed her masculine attire.

It seemed to clinch his decision; for he agreed with Davies to cruise in company, and, after making a feast together in the Frenchman's great cabin—at which Nell had need of all her cunning to convince L'Escuyler that she was no man's woman—the two ships sailed along the eastward course for Callao.

Right up to the land they sailed, put about, and sailed back to sea. Twice they sailed the traverse, and never a sign of Cook or his promised squadron. Then on a dark night when twenty leagues offshore the lookouts on both ships shouted together—

"Light low down in the southwest!"

## XXI

THE sighted light crept slowly nearer, and in the morning watch L'Escuyler hung out the signal agreed upon between him and John Cook. It was answered, and wary gunners extinguished their matches.

But on the *Cadiz* Ed Davies bade his men keep their matches alight, covered out of sight, for while he knew very well what his own line of conduct would be, he was not so sure of Cook. This more especially since no other ship's light had appeared over the whole dark horizon to indicate the presence of Swan or the other ships of Cook.

"John's *Scorpion* seems to lack company," remarked Nell, lounging near the after-gun and peering into the darkness for signs of what went on. "Can he be alone, d'ye think, Ed?"

"Mayhap he showed his sting," answered Davies, himself as puzzled.

He called softly aloft to Goliath, sitting on the cross-jack yard, demanding news. Goliath slid down quickly.

"Dar ain't de flicker ob a light nowhere, cappen," he said. "De sea lay black as a nigger, sar. But looks lak dey's a-h'istin' out boats frum de *Scorpion*. Dar! Hear dem tayckles squeal?"

Through the warm, quiet air came the chirrup of blocks; and lights glowed from the Frenchman's great cabin windows and all along his bulwarks. Davies began to chafe with impatience, for he felt none too secure when two men out of a total of three held consultations and he was not called in.

But his fears were groundless. While Cook's boats were yet dry of bottom, a hail came down from the Frenchman for him to repair on board.

"I'm going too!" cried Nell.

"Ye leave not Steve Carr behind, neither!" growled Steve.

"Ye both remain in our own ship," returned Davies sharply. "This is no time for private grudges. Stay here, girl. I shall bring Cook with me when I return, if the dog's not so hot he wants to set on to me at sight.

"By holding yer rage in hand, Nell, ye can advance our business more than by sticking that long steel in's gizzard. Time enow for that.

"As for you, Steve Carr, neither now nor at any time must Cook know ye're in my ship. Nell he knows right well is here; but you—for aught he knows, ye're either rotting on Aves or swinging in chains to a Port Royal gibbet. So do you hide yerself if I bring him on board. Goliath's lieutenant here."

The boat was launched, and quickly Davies reached the French ship, climbing aboard by the mizzen chains while John Cook was still on his own deck. L'Escuyler met him at the poop ladder, and in the glare of the lanthorns they regarded each other intently, meeting fairly face to face and seeking for evidence of intention. Old enemies, with a third element now coming in, required to be sure of motives. Davies met the Frenchman's look with a soft laugh, and the other shrugged his shoulders and smiled too.

"Capitan Cook he's *batteau* seem not to flot so well," remarked L'Escuyler. "He's dry wid ze sun. But where is ze many sheeps he say he bring? He say nossing zat he bring Edouard Davies, no; but Capitan Swan, and many ozzer sheeps, yes."

He hesitated a moment, glancing sharply at Davies' averted face, and then lowered his voice and spoke swiftly:

"Ees it zat we must accept heem at all now? Eef he has but one sheep, weell he be of sufficient help zat we must have heem? Eet ees you who knows where zat gold went to——"

"Aye, or you," laughed Davies, his

flashing eyes meeting the Frenchman's squarely. "I thought you and John Cook were like brothers in this venture.

"But what of it? We shall need men, and since he seems to be alone, why, —— me, let's use him, L'Escuyler."

"Vairee well zen. We can throw heem away after, yes. But hees *batteau* ees flot now. He comes."

Cook's boat pulled within hail and paused.

"Afore I come aboard ye, L'Escuyler, what's the ship ye have in company? Is it Swan?"

"Zat ees ze *Cadiz*, Capitan Edouard Davies' sheep. He——"

"Ye lie, blast yer heart!" yelled Cook furiously. "I sank Ed Davies in th' Gut o' th' Straits! Speak true, man, or I come not nigh ye. I've encountered treachery enough since quittin' Aves."

"Come aboard, John, and tip us yer flipper, man. 'Tis no dead man, either," roared Davies jovially, leaping on to a carronade and leaning out in the glare of the bulwark lanthorn held for the boat's guidance. "They told ye I was dead once before, on Aves. Did ye find me a corpse?"

"——'s mirth! I wish I had!" retorted Cook, astounded.

There was something in this unaccountable appearance of a man whom he had fully believed to be lying in the Magellan Straits, if not dead at least a hopeless castaway from a sunken ship, which gave pause to his mad impulse to blaze away with his pistols at the handsome, smiling face. He savagely bade his crew pull alongside, and in no merry mood he leaped aboard the ship to confront L'Escuyler and Davies; and the Frenchman greeted him suavely.

"Hah, *mon ami*, Capitan Cook, eet is long we 'ave waited for you. Ees ze ozzer sheeps makin' ze passage?"

COOK glared from one to the other, and suddenly he realized that John Cook alone facing the two men who alone supposedly knew of the booty he desired, was a different man entirely from John Cook as admiral of a fleet having Swan for commodore. Then he had expected to use the Frenchman, and Davies, after that notable mariner had joined him so opportunely, until the treasure were found; and to discard both in the end.

But that which might have been possible backed by Swan and a squadron looked far beyond possibility when his single ship sailed in company with the two men he had meant to cheat out of their just shares. He decided to cloak both the fury he felt against Davies for the matter of that lost girl, and the undoubted astonishment at seeing the man himself after having surely sunk him and his ship in the Narrows. He followed the others into the great cabin in glowering silence.

There L'Escuyler waved him to a seat, and a mulatto set out wine and meat. Davies lounged on a corner of the table, watching Cook curiously, and was about to ask him about Swan and the rest of the considerable fleet he once had, when Cook swore a splitting oath, drank off a flagon of sack and slammed his fist down on the table, making the cabin resound like a drum.

"By Satan's horns!" he cried. "Here I am, and ye hold the gage o' me, Ed Davies! Like a dog ye slipped away from me before we fell in wi' Swan, though I made ye the gun signal agreed on for parley."

"'S death! Was that you, John?" exclaimed Davies, smiling brightly. "—— me, but we all forgot 't was a war-ship ye'd taken. We took ye for a Don, o' truth, and when ye fired that gun we ran."

L'Escuyler sat between them, a big, fleshy man as dark as a Moor, with greasy black hair and eyes that glittered icily like a serpent's. Just the ghost of a smile twisted his thin lips at Davies' outrageous tale, but his snaky eyes were colder still as he glanced at Cook, dwelling on his retort.

"'Tis a lie, but 'twill serve," came like an explosion. "'Twas but the beginning o' trouble. Listen, and I'll tell ye both what chanced right up to this hour, and tell me then if ever man and luck kept wider courses."

Cook swigged off another vast flagon as if suffering from drouth. Scowling darkly into the cup, he muttered a curse upon women and false friends, and began:

"'Tis all along o' that wench, Nell Clark. Between her and you, Davies, ye've twisted John Cook's tail. All debts will be paid, never fear. But now's the time for other matters, and ye can bide in security for me. Never mind why ye ran away, Ed, and let it pass.

"I met Swan. The rogue was glad at sight o' my stout ship full o' hearty lads

He had three ships o' burthen himself, and we agreed he should keep command until we fell in wi' you again. But we never did, but for a sight o' ye off the Capes o' Brazil. How ye slipped the bulldog's more than I can guess. But slip him ye did, and set him after us when we thought we'd weathered him snug and handsome.

"And that was the beginnin' of our black ill luck. First the king's whelps overhauled and took Swan's two slower ships, and still she hung on our heels. In the bitter seas about the Falklands we slipped him again, and once we got sight o' you, Davies, from our masthead. 'Tis higher than yours by ten feet.

"We got drove off, as mayhap ye were; but we made th' Virgins, seeing nothin' o' you nor Swan then. Swan had agreed to fire a gun every watch if he gained the Straits before we; and I was to do the like.

"In a plaguy fog we entered the Gut o' the Narrows, and the lookout spied another ship comin' down on us through the thick o't. 'Twasn't to be seen who she was; but we heard a gun fired ahead, inside, and then we knew 'twas Swan in the Straits and could be no other than Ed Davies sailin' along wi' us in the fog."

Cook glared murderously when Davies leaped to his feet with a ringing laugh. Even the snaky eyes of the Frenchman held amusement when the ghastly joke broke upon him.

"So you pounded Swan, and thought 'twas me, hey?" laughed Davies.

"We sunk him!" snarled Cook. "My rascals had boiled all th' voyage, waitin' to be clapped alongside o' ye for desartin' us. Swan must ha' thought we was you, too, for our first shot was answered in good earnest, and there we fought, in fog thick as gunsmoke, until t' other ship crashed into the cliffs and started firin' minute guns for help.

"Help! We had none for you, Davies! So we lost Swan, and here am I, one instid o' a fleet."

COOK glared around as if he expected to hear some dreadful fate decreed for him. Instead he encountered only smiles, and L'Escuyler waved a quieting hand toward him, bidding him drink and forget his troubles.

"Eet is nozzing," he remarked carelessly. "Wiz many sheeps zere would be many shares. Three fine sheeps like dese, wiz brave capitans like we, and brave men below will be se sufficient numbaire to go forward wiz, and zere shall be ze less share an' ze greater reward to each. Ees it not?

"Now we shall make plan. Ees it to be San Juan del Sur, wiz Rivas after, zen on to ze lake? Or ees it first Realejo and Leon, zen ze lake?"

"Plague! Ha'n't we agreed on them last two cities?" growled Cook, not yet cooled off.

"That was with an army," Davies put in quietly. "Realejo is a sizable city for our force, John. Besides, San Juan's a good harbor within better marching journey o' the lake. Ain't it the lake we want access to most?

"Let's assault San Juan first, and hold it. Rivas won't be so tough a nut to crack, and we have a line o' supply to the edge o' the lake. To th' nor'ard 'tis two hundred mile from the coast to the place where the spirits snatched up that gold—" Davies grinned at the Frenchman, who lost his suavity for a moment to glower back—"while from San Juan 'tis but seventy. Did ye but know the jungle as L'Escuyler and I know it, John, you'd want no urging which course to lay, lad.

"Set th' course between ye then," retorted Cook. "'T will make no differ what I urge when ye ha' all stewed up beforehand."

"Zat ees so," purred the Frenchman, looking more than ever like a fat, lazy serpent as he slumped in his great chair and regarded Cook unwinkingly. "Zis only does eet make difference, zat zere ees no room for ze man who ees not wiz us in everyt'ing. We are all for each an' each for all, yes, so zere shall be no quarrel after we decide. We sail for ze port decide on now. Are we togezzer all?"

"I'm wi' ye," said Davies, rising and stretching with apparent indifference. "Decide it between ye. I'm going aboard. We'll keep in company, and ye can hail me which port 'tis agreed on."

"What's th' pother about!" cried Cook, uneasy at the tense atmosphere that seemed to have filled the cabin suddenly. "O' course I'm wi' ye! What else did I make such a scurvy voyage for? San Juan 'tis, and be —— to ye, Davies! Y' ever was a blunderin' bird o' ill omen."

"Zen San Juan eet is, mates," smiled the Frenchman, uncoiling his long length out of

the chair. "From zis hour we sail wizin hail of each ozzer. *Bon soir, mes amis.* Geef my lof' to ze charmin' Meestress Nell, M'sieu' Davies."

Davies laughed outright in Cook's suffused face, and clapped him heavily on the back as they ascended the cabin stairway.

" 'Twas a cruel deal the gods dealt ye, John, o' truth. Grin, man; grin, that ye alone survived wi' full ship's company at yer back of all Swan's expedition, and lick yer chops at the full meal soon to be set afore ye. Come wi' me to my ship and quaff a cup o' sack along o' Nell. She'll be a merry wench at seein' ye again."

"Aye, wi' that long knife o' hers jinglin' loose in 's sheath!" muttered Cook.

He greatly desired to enter into the good fellowship that apparently possessed Davies and the Frenchman, but felt none too secure yet. Davies guided him to the boat of the *Cadiz.*

"Plague take thy croakin' soul, John!" he said. "Did ye ever know a wench spurn other men if she nursed spite against her first? I tell ye she'll ha' none o' me, nor any other man. The Frenchman made his assault, and was repulsed. Come and feast thine eyes on her, lad. I'll warrant she'll be swoonin' wi' joy at sight of ye."

Nell, waiting for the boat's return, caught John Cook's voice, and hurriedly forced Steve Carr into concealment. Small time she had to school herself against the meeting; but her welcome was all Davies had promised.

When Cook boarded his own ship toward morning he wore the old-time smirk of self-satisfaction; he lacked little of electing himself leader of the venture and lover of Nell Clark with the one ballot. His thoughts ran thus:

"Nell's a proper wench for a man. None o' yer weepy chits like that other. She has a sneakin' likin' for me too. And Davies likes my notion o' befoolin' L'Escuyler, wi'out doubt."

## XXII

FAR from the coast, to avoid giving alarm at their appearance prematurely, the little squadron of three ships sailed north. L'Escuyler had assumed command, apparently without thought on the part of the other captains, though Davies wore his old debonair smile everlastingly and seemed to accept a subordinate rank in the best of temper.

What John Cook thought could only be guessed at, for, sullen and disgruntled on joining, he maintained that aspect afterward, only brightening up when the captains met on one or other of the ships and Nell Clark was present. Right cleverly did Nell play with them, John Cook and the Frenchman, while Davies looked on blandly, chuckling in his chest.

" 'Tis a royal sport, Nell," he said one brilliant morning.

The ships were again on the equator, far to the westward, and the Frenchman was bearing up toward the others to order their future course.

"Here's L'Escuyler, casting sheep's eyes at ye, girl, and John Cook quite sure he'll make woman o' ye yet, for all that he flung ye aside for a weepy wench back yonder, and Steve Carr needs but a glance o' yer own bright eyes to hug ye till yer very bones crack."

"And what o' yourself, Ed?" challenged Nell.

"Me? I look on, lass, enjoy the sport, and watch that ye come to no hurt," replied Davies, suddenly serious.

The mood was but a flash; his smile returned, tinged with a trace of contempt, and he went on:

"T'other side o' the game's not so lightsome, though 'tis laughable enough. Here's Ed Davies, watching the fat Frenchman, waiting 's time to settle a stiff score wi' him. There's John Cook, all unknowin' o' the mess a-cookin' for him at the hands o' Steve Carr and Nell Clark, itchin' to slip knife into me for robbing him o' that little lass in Aves; ready, too, to hide that itchin' and conspire wi' me against the Frenchman till his turn's served. And yon's the fat frog, lickin' 'is loose chops at thought o' the meal he'll have when he's squared tally wi' Ed Davies and John Cook, and ready to join either against t'other!"

Davies broke into a low, chuckling rumble of mirth, and encouraged Bravo, on Nell's shoulder, to seize his horny finger in its terrible beak.

"And here we are, Nell; even Bravo's ready to chaw up his best friend; an' all fine and handsome, three fine ships go sailin' through Summer seas, full o' murderous hate, yet every man aboard of 'em outwardly boon companion o' every other one.

"——'s flames! I believe the only human being aboard the fleet wi'out a grudge against somebody is Goliath. All he wants is to be full fed today against a fare o' fightin' tomorrow, by Satan!"

"Aye, and even he holds wholesome rage against the Spaniard," replied Nell. "I saw him sousing his great carcass wi' sea water this forenoon, and his broad back's a very gridiron o' scars. He told me 'twas a Don as slaved him, and a Don's sons as flayed him, while Don and Doña looked on and taught th' cubs how to strike to cut flesh to ribbons, and where to lay th' whip to sting the most. Well may ye say, Ed, 'tis a right merry company.

"But ye're blind if ye think there's calm among the men, false or assured. Steve tells me they're growling like scorched bears in th' pit because you hold so far to sea when yonder lies a pleasant shore wi' towns to plunder and ships o' the Dons to take. They mutter, too, that ye're keeping 'em fed on rotten rations and stale water again, as ye were t'other side Magellan. The dogs are fat and full o' blood. Ye'll spoil 'em if ye give 'em no work."

"They must ha' patience, as I must have," returned Davies sharply.

He, as well as the men, fretted with long inaction. He saw the French ship bowling along within gunshot, and remarked:

"In a little while we'll speak L'Escuyler. Bid Goliath call all hands to hear. 'Twill flatter the dogs."

Soon the Frenchman braced up and fell in alongside the *Cadiz* and the *Scorpion*, running easily between them. The captain stood on the high poop, speaking-trumpet in hand, and bellowed:

"Ze Galapagos ees wan hoondred mile east, *messieu's*. Make rendezvous zere. Mooch good turtle meat an' ze great bird he ees zere, an' water, an' wood, plentee. Ze men shall stretch ze legs——"

Like a howling gale of wind the swarming crew of the *Cadiz* yelled back:

"Wood an' water be ——, ol' frog! Clap us alongside o' ship or town where rum and wine and booty's to be got! Is it a jaunt o' pleasure we're joined for?"

"Quiet, ye scurvy dogs!" roared Davies, pretending an anger he little felt.

Men glanced blackly at him, muttering foul oaths, but none cared to invite again his peculiar demonstrations of control over them. Davies held up his hand, and sang out to the Frenchman:

"We'll meet ye at the islands, comrade. But can ye give me liquor? My lads are parched wi' drought for something stouter than water."

"I have not ze wine to spare, Capitan Davies," the Frenchman yelled back.

Cook was howling at him, too, but Davies was the nearer, and his men looked turbulent.

"But ze *Cadiz* ees ver' fast sheep. You shall cruise alone. We shall take water and provision for you; you shall seek wine for us, wiz what booty may come. Eet ees at ze Bay of Salinas we shall meet. But weel not ze Mademoiselle Nell exchange to my sheep? She mos' not be in ze fight, no?"

"I'll take care of—" Davies began to shout sharply.

Nell spoke hurriedly beside him.

"Yes, let me go, Ed. —— me, d'ye doubt I'm able to fend for myself? 'Twill stop the two of 'em plottin' against ye, Ed, if they have me to play on their jealousies. Let me go."

Davies shrugged his shoulders. He glanced into the girl's animated face, detected the glint of strong purpose in her fine eyes, and caught, too, the subtle line of grimness that settled for a fleeting second at her red mouth's corners.

"Send a boat for her," he shouted. "I'll trust ye, L'Escuyler, though I ha' small cause to."

Nell swaggered over to the Frenchman in all the panoply of a brother of the Black Flag, belted, booted, and wearing a broad sash stuck full with pistols, knife and cutlas. That was for the benefit of the crew.

For the bedazzlement of the fat Frenchman she had softer gear, slung at a seaman's back in a seagoing bag. She paused halfway up the ship's side to turn and wave a parting to the *Cadiz*, then leaped down upon the deck and strode aft beside L'Escuyler, coolly indifferent to the broad grins and audible comments of the mongrel crew.

THE *Cadiz* sailed away from the other two ships with a celerity that proved amply her superior speed and handiness. As the separate courses diverged and the ships astern sank into the blue of the sea, the discontented crew assumed new ardor, and with Goliath's shining black

face to urge them on, grindstones whirled and bit rusted edges from steel; armorers' forges erupted sparks while pieces of body-steel were repaired or renewed, and the gunner's crew drew the charges of the guns, swabbed out the pieces and recharged them with fresh powder. Every man had a task; and now it was Davies himself who urged upon his men a similar action to that which had been the primary cause of the petty theft of rawhide for which he had hanged Badoes in irons to the yardarm.

"I tell ye they'll smell a rat," protested Steve Carr, to whom Davies suggested it. "Look! Ther's a bit o' th' backbone an' a couple o' ribs left o' Badoes yet. If ye'd cut th' corpus down when it begun to rot, ye might ha' worked this now."

Davies laughed softly. He ever found amusement in the coarser notions of Carr.

"Mayhap ye're right, Steve. We ain't all alike. No man can be all to everybody. The gunner to's linstock, th' steersman to's wheel and th' cook to th' foresheet's a powerful good maxim. This is mine own notion. I'll try it out wi'out askin' help o' ye, Steve; then the dogs won't hold ye answerable."

"Better hold yer luff, that's what I say!" grumbled Steve.

Davies stepped to the forward rail of the poop and roared:

"Belay awhile, lads."

The grindstones stopped; the boys at the bellows let the forge fires sink into the coals. Gunners halted, sponge in hand, gaping aft.

" 'Tis just come upon me as this is my saint's day! By th' horns o' Satan! I was letting it pass. Make speed wi' the tasks in hand. Armorer, clap thy fires under cover soon's may be. Gunner, load yer pieces wi' speed. I ha' mind to make ye a banquet e'en though it be the last afore ye take me a ship.

"Goliath, you grinnin' dog, break out full fare o' flesh to gorge all hands, and make the cooks start their coppers. Carr, do you break the head o' that lousy cabin lout an he produce not every dram o' rum and wine the ship holds. I'll have me a birthday wi' all our jolly dogs if't be the last gorge on earth."

The feast was spread. The wide decks, bathed in mellow sunlight in late afternoon, shaded in generous patches by the great sails, were filled with noisy groups of guzzling seamen whose appetites were proof against any wonder where all the wet provisions were coming from in a short-rationed ship.

" 'Twill clean the lazaret to the corners," growled Steve Carr.

Goliath, gnawing luxuriously upon a huge beef-bone with a half-gallon measure of Canary sack beside him, was as careless as the crew as to the source of good things. So long as the sun warmed his big frame and his belly was not slack, he was as a child in his appetite.

" 'Tis what I meant," returned Davies, watching the scene curiously.

His smiling face held a trace of that quality, however, which had settled there during those terrible days among the snow and ice.

" 'Tis as I want it, Steve. Can they but drink themselves drunk enough afore the stores run out, mayhap they'll be less hungry for the coast.

"D'ye see, but for the Islands I' Galapagos, there's no coast any nearer than the port o' rendezvous. The dogs think 'tis only a short sail eastward to towns and harbors. And 'twill serve us evil to appear off any port before we make the final harbor. News travels fast along the Pacific shores since Frankie Drake smoked 'em up.

"So I'm holding a course straight for San Juan del Sur, Steve; and do you but get the rascals tipsy enough ye may tell 'em I'll clap 'em alongside a galleon from Panama afore they get sober. 'Twill prove a lie, no doubt, but 'twill serve to keep their blasted eyes trimmed ahead instead o' ever to the eastward.

"Now mix rum wi' their wine, and ply 'em well wi' it. 'Twill last two watches anyhow."

## XXIII

AS HE watched his roistering crew, rapidly growing uproarious as the cans of liquor passed, Davies realized that his parting from Nell Clark might prove of greater moment than either he or she had suspected. That is, he did not believe she had any deeper motive in going than to placate L'Escuyler.

Now the situation was presented in his mind's eye, and he saw John Cook gnawing his lips at sight of Nell aboard the Frenchman. All in all, his own condition was becoming more pleasant with every hour glass turned.

He had no fear on Nell's behalf. She had proved on many a stout man's carcass her ability to take good care of herself if given but an equal chance, and more she never asked. And, though she insisted that she be given the status and treatment of a man only, Nell was nevertheless a true woman, and knew right well how to bring into action all the wiles of every woman since Eve, the first buccaneer.

His own desire had been simply to get his unruly crew on edge against the time of real action. The voyage had been long and wearisome, with never a fight or chase to liven it since those hazardous days on the San Roque reefs when he had refused to fight but had endured chase and bombardment like a craven merchantman.

A little engagement with a Don trader, if luck brought such in sight, would set his men on their toes, blood 'em, and arouse their long repressed savagery. That quality would soon be needed if they were ever to see the shores of the lake.

The orgy lasted through the night and well into the heat of the next day; then the decks of the *Cadiz* presented the appearance of pig-pens full of comatose, clothed hogs. Carr regarded the scene heavily; his own share in the drinking had served only to intensify his gloomy outlook. As the sun rose higher, sending down withering waves of heat upon the sprawling men, he shook his head dolefully.

"A pretty mess there'd be an another sail hove in sight! When they wake wi' a head apiece and a drouth, oh!"

Davies had come up from below with his cross-staff, and heard Steve's wail. He laughed quietly, bringing the mate around with a startled jerk.

"Ever croakin', Steve! What a man it is for dumps! The lads'll be so sick when they wake they'll be like sheep; but an I show 'em how we may fall in wi' one o' the Panama ships afore mornin' they'll simmer through the night like wolves, won't they?"

"Panama ship?" grumbled Steve. "D'ye hope to find one?"

"Why not? 'Twas my idea in carrying on. 'Tis about the time the galleons sail west across the Pacific, and as we steer now we should cross their track. Cheer up, man! The fumes o' the liquor are givin' ye visions."

" 'Twas yer own festered brain as made th' merry jest, Ed," retorted Steve, emboldened by his sufferings, which were acute.

It had not been his luck to be able to curl up like one of the men and sleep off his potations. Davies clapped him on the back and all but upset him.

"Go below, lad. 'Tis nigh noon. Get ye a draft o' sack out o' my cabin and turn in. I'll keep the deck till Goliath turns out."

Steve vanished, and Davies watched the sun come to meridian. He struck the bell himself, but there was no sign of the watch relieving.

Goliath appeared, rubbing his swollen eyes, grinning like a cheerful gorilla at his own heaviness of head. The helmsman slept, careless of reproof. But the ship steered herself as well as he had done while awake, and Goliath took him from the wheel, still sleeping, and put him to bed in a coil of rope; then he lashed the helm.

So the ship swam on, driving along on her proper course for the rendezvous, her turbulent spirits calmed in drunken unconsciousness, a prey to any marauder that might happen by, yet with a captain who whistled gaily through his teeth and smiled as he regarded his ship of living dead. And into the seething caldron of many hates, already bubbling to a boil, another element was even then sailing.

Mid-afternoon came with increased heat of sun and yet no slackening of the kindly breeze that was giving Davies so welcome a push in the direction he wanted to go, while his men snored on in the last stages of stupefaction. He wanted them to broil and stew under that cruel sun during the day, so that they might be the more miserable and the more susceptible to government on awakening in the cool of evening. Already the ship had crossed the southernmost limit of the track used by the silver galleons, and of her own voyage she lacked but a scant two hundred leagues to the Bay of Salinas, the rendezvous.

IT WAS toward evening when the galleon was sighted, dead ahead, and yawing wildly as if no human hand guided her. She appeared with startling abruptness out of what had seemed to be a speckless sea; even Goliath's keen eye had been deceived by the glittering sheen of the long sunbeams. But at last the negro saw her, and his lusty roar awoke the crew to agonizing life and brought

Davies on deck running. He had lain down but fifteen minutes before.

"Dar's de Spainer, boys! Git up an' git her!"

Befuddled men stumbled about the decks, blearily staring into the softening sun-sheen in search of the elusive speck that was the galleon. Five miles separated the ships yet—too far for any piece of ordnance aboard the *Cadiz*; but the course of the stranger was so erratic that the other was overhauling her swiftly. And the sun drew nearer the horizon, the air cooled, and drowsy brains dispelled the vapors of stale liquor at sight of prey.

"Give her a shot from the bow piece, gunner!" cried Davies when they had got within range.

He was puzzled at the actions of the ship ahead. She was near enough now for him to see she was high out of the water, as if but partly laden, and smaller than the huge galleons Spain was accustomed to send across the Pacific. Besides, she was sailing on no course suitable for such a ship, whether bound east or west, or by Magellan to Spain.

The gun barked, and a solid shot played ducks and drakes alongside the chase before sinking into the sea ahead. There was no sign on board the stranger. She held on her wavering way.

"Put me a ball into his stern windows!" cried Davies.

The gun belched again, and the ornate woodwork of the high Spanish stern was rent and splintered as two windows were made one. Still there came no response; the ship wallowed on, the *Cadiz* drew closer, and the sun lipped the horizon like a globule of blood.

Wary of a trap, Davies sailed up alongside the Spaniard at pistol-shot distance, hailed, received no reply in the gathering dusk, and ordered a broadside. The guns crashed their thunder, spat their fire and iron, and the Spaniard reeled to the shock. Yet she remained silent; and, springing to the wheel himself, Davies sheered in closer and yelled:

"Out graplins! A dose o' langrage, gunner! Then stand by all to board!"

While the gunners crammed their horrible scrap metal into the guns, Goliath, ever on the lookout, caught something in the last shaft of light cast by the sinking sun, and after a moment of doubt opened his cavernous mouth to yell. The discharge of the guns drowned his shout, and the next moment the ships came together with a crash, the graplins were cast and the hungry marauders swarmed aboard with Davies leading them, too swiftly for the giant black to repeat his cry of news of that other sail he had caught sight of ahead.

Darkness fell as the sun went down; yet there was still light enough to reveal wide decks bare of life, but full of men dead and doubly dead since that final murderous hail of langrage. And a dead hand at the wheel steered the ship of death fair in the wake of that other sail Goliath had seen.

"By golly, sar, dat's de fella as been hyar!" the giant bellowed.

"What are ye droolin' about now?" rasped Davies, furious at the sight he had stumbled upon.

"Ah seen anudder sail ahead, cappen, an' hollered, but de gun he pop an' drun my beller. Cain't see her now. Too dark. But she dar, jes' de same."

Disappointed boarders rummaged the ship in search for some living body on which to wreak their chagrin. Swollen heads, too, made them irritable. Even Ed Davies had lost his smile as he tripped over prone bodies, horribly mangled, on his way to the after cabin to satisfy himself if all indeed were beyond speaking.

"Fling off hatches and see if there's aught left to serve our needs, Goliath," he cried, and entered the cabin to find a reeking shambles of men, women, and a child.

No arms were to be seen. It looked like wanton slaughter of unarmed folks out of pure savagery. Wine was spilled, and was not to be distinguished from blood. A woman lay with her hand outstretched. It lacked two fingers. The stumps were bleeding.

Davies regained the deck at a bound, furious.

"Ha' ye found aught ye want?" he shouted.

"Ain't much, dat's a fack," grinned Goliath.

His own experiences as a bit of the cargo in slave-ships had made him immune to gruesome impressions.

"De men hab took out ten puncheon ob liquor an' some cask o' beer an' some salted fish. Dar ain't much beside, cappen. De t'ief what been hyar afore got de bes'."

"All aboard the *Cadiz*," roared Davies,

standing on the high bulwark and snatching up a grapnel. "Out wi' ye, lads, an' let's see who's robbed us of our prey."

The *Cadiz* fell away from the Spaniard, leaving her and her ghastly freight to the winds and seas. At midnight when a full moon hung in the zenith the sharp eyes of Goliath aloft picked up the fleeing shape of a small pinnace, plainly to be seen, and as plainly hurrying with what speed she had in fear of the pursuing *Cadiz*.

In an hour more the bow gun of the *Cadiz* sent a shot over the chase. Now, as in the case of the dead ship, there came no reply.

"Another ship o' corpses?" laughed Davies harshly.

"Not she!" snapped Steve Carr. "She steers too true to be in hands o' dead men. Try her wi' another pill."

Another shot thundered forth, and the splash was visible from the *Cadiz*. It took the sea under the pinnace's counter; and like an echo came a response. A tiny piece spat flame, and a ball no bigger than Davies' fist hit the *Cadiz* with a spiteful spat and fell off into the sea.

"'Tis a spunky little man," laughed Davies.

And he said no more until he hailed by voice from a scant hundred feet distance. Then came an answer in the shape of a pitiful broadside, the whole of which might have been wadded into one of the *Cadiz*' guns. A voice was heard aboard the pinnace, yelling for pikes to repel boarders, and Steve Carr seized his captain's arm in amazement.

"By th' livin' soul o' Davy Jones, that's the tongue o' Cap'n Swan!" he yelled.

## XXIV

SWAN, like Davies, was too big a fish in the puddle of sea-rovers for another rover to be long deceived by any change in his appearance due to hardship. The pinnace had come alongside the greater ship without more ado, upon Ed Davies and Steve Carr making themselves known. Now Swan sat, with Burden, his lieutenant, at the broad table in the cabin of the *Cadiz*, facing Davies and Carr over tall flagons and gobbets of meat, making their introductory explanation.

Hard faces they had, weatherbeaten, hairy, seamed and grimed from long exposure and evil passions. Though they admitted having fed generously within the hour, they wolfed the meat and swallowed the wine before them like men who had known bitter shortage.

Swan was a man of build as unlike his name as could well be imagined. Short, thick and broad, low of brow and shifty of eye, he was the embodiment of brute force and ignorance. His lieutenant, Burden, was better looking, yet so obviously in awe of his captain that he lost any advantage he may have deserved from his appearance.

"The rat fired into us in the Gut!" swore Swan, his eyes gleaming with sullen fires. "Never tell me John Cook mistook us for you, Davies. He seen as my ships was gone, seen as it was him and me alone to j'ine ye or the frog, and took at me in th' fog an' swirl o' the Narrows."

"But he said he sunk ye," remarked Davies. "How are ye here as soon as us, who sailed straight up from Magellan wi' a stout ship underfoot?"

"Ye see me!" growled Swan, fiercely. "Had ye seen me or my lads afore we found meat aboard yonder Spainer, ye'd not ask how came we here. Boats through the Straits; a fight wi' Indians whenever we tried for water or meat; half the lads who wasn't drowned or killed by Cook's traitorous shot killed by arrows or starvation or cold! We took the pinnace off Valdivia, and sailed in sight o' the shore all the time, daring onsets of enemies if we could but win north in time to face Cook an' his *Scorpion*.

"He and you and the Frenchman sailed far west, did ye not? Well then, that's how ye find me up wi' ye. But, if we fell not in wi' that Don this afternoon ye'd ha' picked up a starved pinnace full o' starved gallus crows, I tell ye, Ed!"

Swan uttered a harsh, terrible laugh.

"I tell ye, I couldn't stay my bold fellows when meat and drink were to hand! Mother o' Satan!"

"I saw it," returned Davies shortly. "'Twould ha' done credit to Lolonais at his drunkest. Dirty butchery, Swan. I doubt not but ye're plain murderer at bottom, hey?"

Swan scowled; but Davies feared none of the tribe of rovers, and his steady eye warned Swan of the futility of taking umbrage.

"What of it, then?" he demanded. "The Don fought us off. We starved and thirsted

Should we ha' meekly asked meat and drink, when women aboard o' her flashed jeweled hands at my rascals?

"Blood an' powder! I let 'em loose, Ed! We took food and drink, and a trifle o' gems and pieces of eight—not enough to make song about, Ed, but we'll divide——"

"I want none o' yer loot," said Davies, rising abruptly. "Ye made a clean job o' the Don. Sleep well on't. But about ye joinin' wi' me in this Nicaragua business, if ye do that ye'll sail under my direction, and if ye fight as well as ye butcher ye'll earn a share o' the booty. But let me see sign o' ye forgetting my interest in yer spite against Cook, an' I'll set ye down hard, Swan, and well ye know I can do it!"

"Blast my heart, then! All I want is Cook's tripes stewed in's own blood. To secure that meal I'll kiss th' dog morn, noon, an' evenin' to please ye, Ed Davies, while yer business is afoot. But when we turn coastward again, remember, I owe ye naught. On them terms I sail wi' ye, an' be —— to ye."

So well did Swan play his part that when the *Cadiz* and the pinnace fell in with L'Escuyler and Cook a scant three leagues outside the harbor of rendezvous, the first amazed hail from the *Scorpion* was speedily changed into a shout of welcome. And when the ships had moored and the crews trooped ashore to stretch legs and make a barbecue in celebration of their arrival at the end of the sea part of their outward voyage, the only outward evidence that irritating elements found place among the expedition was the palpable jealousy existing between the Frenchman and Cook. That was doubly apparent when Nell left both of them with a joyous greeting for Ed Davies as he stepped ashore.

It required but a brief reckoning for Davies to understand that while he had cruised back and forth with the Frenchman waiting for Cook, after both had taken a wide western course to avoid giving the alarm on the coast, there had been ample time for Swan to make his astounding voyage. But even allowing all that, there was a depth of bitter hate, a resolution dire and unexampled, expressed in that voyage which boded ill for John Cook.

For mere safety it would have been easy for Swan to carry his remnants of crew north by the eastern coast and back to their own haunts. The vengeful spirit that carried him stubbornly on to his original destination in spite of hardship too fierce for ordinary human endurance marked him as a factor to be reckoned with.

"Nell, the pot almost boils," Ed laughed with a comradely buffet on the girl's back. "Let's see. There's— Oh, I can't keep tally, girl. But Swan's ready to clap a blister to John Cook, and ye say he and the fat Frenchman are at knives out o'er you. Oh, 'tis a merry band, o' truth."

"Aye, it's merry as ——," laughed Nell with an expressive shrug. "Had ye not hove in sight when ye did, Ed, Nell Clark had been undone, belike. Three rascals I sliced wi' steel aboard that ship, and threatened both Cook and the Frenchman. But each in's turn pressed me to a point where I must act instead o' threaten or submit. I fooled both, Ed. Each of 'em's sure in's heart I'm promised to him alone.

"Well ye may say there'll be a boilin' pot o' devil's stew soon. 'Twould be well if ye lost no time on th' march now, comrade."

"We won't, Nell," replied Davies, regarding her with a new, softer gaze after hearing her relate her adventures with L'Escuyler and Cook without any of her customary brazenry. "At dawn we march to take San Juan del Sur at rear, to hold for base."

## XXV

TWELVE miles of jungle-fringed shore lay between the bay where the ships were anchored and the town of San Juan del Sur; a full day's march for sea-legged sailors burdened with arms and munitions, iron armor, and, most arduous of all, the need for caution. At dawn the column started, and stumbled on through the blazing heat of morning, jovial at first at prospect of imminent action and the touch of booty; cursing as the jungle heat grew oppressive; snarling like wolves, snapping at each other with steel ever ready when L'Escuyler sharply bade them be silent.

"Clack to yer own spawn, ye bleedin' frog," one of Davies' men shouted defiantly. "We'll be ordered by y'r betters."

"*Sang Dieu!*" the man's nighest companion retorted, whipping out a long knife. "*Mon capitaine* ees leader, no? Peeg!"

Swift as a sunlight gleam, steel flashed between the two; there was a dropping of

cumbrous arms and haversacks and a passage of blades, and the Frenchman dropped, his life spouting from his breast. The short, murderous fight was eloquent of the flood of passions held in the flimsiest check by the exigencies of unified command.

Davies glanced at L'Escuyler, and seized upon the moment to take full advantage of the trace of wavering he saw in the man. Had the French seaman proved victor, the result might have been different.

"L'Escuyler, ye're in minority o' numbers, and my lads are techy," Davies said, stepping alongside the Frenchman. "Do you step down and leave me to lead, at least until the lads have seen booty."

"What matters eet?" returned the Frenchman with a shrug. "Eet is each for all, and all for each, yes. Good! Monsieur Davies shall be ze leader."

Outwardly the change was made without friction; but another inflammable item was added thereby to the combustible mass, already at ignition point. High noon in the forest raised the blood to fever heat until Nell Clark stumbled on blindly, fainting on her feet like any woman for all her mannish guise, and Ed Davies was forced to call a halt for very uncertainty of his mongrel army. They halted in a ferny glade within a dense thicket of wild bananas and pandanus, and flung themselves on the grass in search of coolness near the ground.

"Can't halt for many minutes, Nell," muttered Davies, bringing cool water in his hat and sprinkling her face and chest with it. "See the Frenchman how he glowers."

"Aye; and Cook, since I marched wi' you, Ed."

"Scurvy seize both of 'em, Nell; but ha' ye watched Swan? Pray we come to the town and open the assault before our own lads begin a war o' their own."

Bravo, the parrot, fluttered from Nell's shoulder and perched on a swinging vine as a faint rustling sounded in the thicket. It was too faint to attract notice from any but the bird; and the town was supposed to be too far away yet for any of its people to be feared. But the bird cocked his head sidewise, flapped his wings, and screamed raucously:

"Ther's blood on th' moon! Raw-aw-awk!"

"*Por Dios!*" cried a startled, fearful voice in the thicket, and a Spanish soldier burst through and fled along the jungle path in terror.

"Get him!" roared Davies, and Goliath bounded after the fleeing figure and brought the man back in his arms like a baby.

"Let me talk th' rover's tongue to him," cried Swan, running forward and seizing the captive.

He drew a cord from his belt, swiftly tied it about the Spaniard's temples and then slipped his pistol ramrod between skin and cord. He gave the rod a turn, tightening the cord, and spoke sharply in good Spanish—

"Had ye companions?"

The terrified man gasped a negative. The cord received another twist.

"Had ye companions? Speak true, dog o' Satan!"

The negative was screamed now. Still the cord was twisted.

"The truth, or I'll pluck out yer heart!" snarled Swan.

The wretched Spaniard denied the query again.

"He's speaking truth, Swan," cried Davies, reaching out and staying further torment of the man. "Now ask him how far distant is the town, and what defenses lie on the landward side. Quick!"

The man answered Swan's questions in a frenzy of haste, in fear of that terrible cord.

"The dog says no defenses lie on this side. The fort commands the anchorage. He was following an Indian wench when he stumbled upon us, and hid for very terror. 'Twas the parrot speaking as forced voice from his dry throat. The town lies but half a league distant, and the forest creeps right up to the outer houses."

Davies glanced through the trees, measuring the hour by the descending sun. He needed San Juan del Sur to keep as a base; his ships had orders to come up to the town on the morrow, when it would either be taken or there would be dire need for the ships as a refuge for the beaten expedition; but he wanted the town without loss to himself if possible, and if he could reach the place before the siesta hour was ended a complete surprize would give him an easy conquest.

"Forward!" he cried, and entered the forest by an almost imperceptible path indicated by the trembling captive.

He had not gone three paces when a pistol-shot cracked out behind him, and he

whirled around to see Swan, smoking pistol in hand, kicking aside the Spaniard's dead body. He started back in anger when Nell's voice rang out.

"Murdering swine!" she cried; and discharged her own pistol in Swan's face.

The ball missed him, but the flame scorched his face, and his whiskers smoked. He stared at the woman in ludicrous astonishment, and from her to Davies, in whose angry face he read approval of Nell's action.

"Ha' done, Nell," snapped Davies, seeing nothing could be done for the Spaniard. " 'Tis beyond help now, though I wish ye had not missed Swan, the butcherin' hound."

He met Swan's glaring eye as he spoke, and then turned on his heel and led the march without another word.

BUT for the remainder of the jungle march the muttered oaths and bewildered comments on his unaccountable sympathy with the attempted killing of Swan, who had done only what any decent pirate should have done, were not confined to any one party alone, but entered into the low chatter of every man except perhaps Goliath and Steve Carr, with a very few men of the *Cadiz*. L'Escuyler in particular showed a sort of sneering elation, for he saw clearly that the usurper to the command that was his by right would have to show something very compelling in order to offset his amazing exhibition of soft-heartedness.

The thing which puzzled John Cook, and the Frenchman too, was the queer behavior of Nell Clark. Cook had known her to be much less solicitous of an enemy's safety; the Frenchman knew her only by reputation, plus whatever opinion he had formed concerning her while in his ship.

The last six furlongs of the march proved almost too long. Little side quarrels simmered throughout every fathom of the way, and Swan's men, who had started out as the crew of the true leader of the entire venture, grew mutinous and blatant as the heedless chatter of the others around them became more and more inharmonious. Steel had been drawn a dozen times, and blood let as often, when Davies at last halted abruptly on the edge of the jungle and raised his hand.

"L'Escuyler and Cook," he cried sharply, "I leave to you the seaward forts. Take 'em in rear and ye should have 'em in hand by sundown. Swan, take all your crew and drive through the city in broad line, keeping non-combatants to their houses. We shall meet, wi' what fortune happens, on the seashore in an hour. Forward! And let there be no butchery o' citizens, or ye reckon with me."

"And what are ye doin' in this fine venture?" sneered a man of Cook's crew.

Goliath seized the man by the neck in his two huge hands and lifted him from the ground, holding him there while he looked at Davies for orders.

"I?" laughed Davies without anger. "I make the attack on the front o' the forts, my lad. Let him go, Goliath."

Goliath let go one hand-grip, shifted it to the man's belt and hove him bodily headlong after his fellows. Then when the band had disappeared into the outskirts of the rambling town Davies called his own men together with a whistle and led them at the double through the jungle to the shore. Here he halted them until he heard scattering shots fired behind the fort, and a great gun to seaward boomed out the vain alarm.

"See, lads," he cried, "they take fright. Already they are shifting the great guns from seaward to the landward side. Patience a moment, then——"

Pandemonium burst loose in the town behind the fort. A medley of shots of many degrees of weight shattered the late afternoon silence, and the few great guns already moved thundered forth their answer.

The men behind Steve Carr and Goliath licked their chops as they rammed home pistol-balls, taut-strung good old yew bows, and waited upon their leader's word. At least Davies' own men were with him to the uttermost gasp now the action had begun.

"Now lads!" Davies uttered in quiet, penetrating tones. "Give quarter where 'tis asked, trouble no citizens unless they fight wi' the soldiery, and, if ye want to share in the true treasure we all came for, do no wanton destruction. Remember, I ha' told ye, ye're true mariners and no pirates up to now. Ye're at war wi' the Don, but ye ha' no traffic wi' butchers o' women and babies, nor robbin' o' altars. Ready!"

"Aye! Huzza f'r Ed Davies an' Mistress Nell. Satan seize John Cook an' th' dropsical frog!" roared the ribald crew.

"Then up and at 'em!" shouted Davies, and led the charge up the sloping glacis of a strong fortification which seemed as deserted as a city of the dead. But the hubbub in the town beyond and the hum of confusion nearer at hand gave evidence of life, and as the attackers swarmed up the slope, mounted the walls and peered into the seemingly empty fort a withering fire of musketry swept across the wide, open space between wall and buildings, while on the opposite, unseen side of the fort, big guns began to speak in earnest.

## XXVI

WHATEVER the causes for lack of harmony when idle, or fretting under the strain of a dreary forest march, once the battle was on the attackers fought like bold blades, fought true to orders, and so well carried the rear of the town, in spite of the moving of the great guns, that when Davies led his own men in a helter-skelter charge at the rallying musketeers it was against their own soldiers that the Spanish guns vomited iron and flame, fired by the roaring rovers who had captured them.

The garrison were driven into the castle and secured before the sun had sunk into the broad Pacific, and Davies himself saw that the women and children were placed in temporary safety within the stout walls of the great church, where priests and sisters from the convent very willingly ministered to them out of regard for their own skins. Then, so that there might be as little friction between the various parts of his force as possible, Davies allowed the looting of wine-shops and food-stores to go on while he drove, cajoled, and led the jubilant crew in making good his conquest.

This he did by completing what the Spaniards had too tardily begun. The great guns from the walls were distributed so that a battery faced the sea, another commanded the forest approach, and still other single guns well placed swept the avenues of the town, guarding against surprize from the imprisoned garrison.

Then what remained of the night he spent himself in rest, an example followed wisely by Carr and Goliath, and a great number of his own men from the *Cadiz*. The town resounded with the uproar of the tippling rovers until the dawn broke, and then the real rummaging of the place began while Davies put lookouts on fort flagstaff and forest trees to watch for the coming up of the ships.

"What ha' ye found?" he demanded as one by one the leaders came to report in mid-forenoon.

"Enough to take care on, and more than enough to whet th' lads' whistles," roared Swan, drunk as Noah's pig, begrimed with powder, smeared with blood and staggering under a sack which clanged musically as he hurled it from his shoulder.

"Aye, y' devil's spawn!" rasped Cook, bursting through the crowd and facing Swan with blazing eyes. "Aye, aplenty for all, as ye say, an' ye must needs steal what I ha'——"

"Steal?" growled Swan savagely, and his hand stole to his knife-haft. He crouched menacingly, but Cook was mad with fury and advanced barehanded.

"Steal, I said!"

"Goliath, take hold of him!" snapped Davies, himself springing upon Swan and wrapping his long arms about him.

The black took hold of Cook likewise, and Davies uttered his decree while every man of the venture except the lookouts were there to hear.

"Hear me, lads! Here we are, established in our first conquest, wi' stores o' food and wine galore, and sufficient o' the yellow metal to pay goodly shares. And here ye are, two o' my leaders, seekin' to fly at each other's throats for the sake o' a pot o' gold or two.

"Me ye made leader. So be it. Until one o' ye prove the better man then, I'll be leader and no other.

"And this I tell ye now, so mark it: I ha' bigger treasures in view than the paltry loot o' such a town, and I'll not lose it for any such madman's work as squabblin' among yerselves. Cook, and you, Swan, an ye make not friends, and cease this wrangling, I'll string ye both to the highest tree o' the forest as surely as I strung up Badoes and Bristol.

"Now, if any man hungers for leadership, let him step out and try his luck wi' me. Goliath, let that man loose."

Swan and Cook slunk back into the crowd, glaring hate at Davies, but not a man ventured to take up the gantlet. Mutterings there were, oaths and grumblings; L'Escuyler looked on with an evil

sneer; but neither he nor any man offered to fight for leadership, and Davies there and then told off the men he had selected to remain as garrison of the town.

"Take care ye let no man or woman leave town," he ordered. "I march for the lake by way of Rivas at high noon. The ships should come up before that hour, but we march anyhow. Steve Carr, I make ye commandant of the town. See to it——"

"Blast me if I stay then!" shouted Carr, dashing his broad hat madly upon the ground. "Did I sail wi' ye to be left out o' the sport at last?"

"I make ye commandant," repeated Davies coolly, meeting Steve's wild eye steadily. "I ha' need for a stout man o' guts in the rear. The town's our refuge if everything else goes gallusways. As for how far ye sailed, —— me, but ye were picked out o' the sea like a ruddy castaway, Steve, and ought to be thankful ye gained station wi' me, who were Cook's right-hand man. See to thy men, and come to me before we set out. I'll give ye last orders."

Davies and Nell Clark took the shore path and reached the high bluff south of the fort. The sea lay speckless and level, ruffled almost imperceptibly by a crooning breeze that should have brought the ships up hours before if all were well.

"'Tis a scurvy crew ye have, Ed," remarked Nell. "Ye are not sure the dogs ye left wi' the ships are honest. Here's Swan and Cook ready to kill each other, the Frenchman grinnin' as if he had some woundy foul play up 's sleeve, and Steve Carr——"

"Let Steve be, Nell," smiled Davies. "The dog's one o' the few I can trust. Goliath, and Steve, and you, and some o' my own lads o' the *Cadiz* are stout o' guts and loyal to me. Ha' no fear I shall forget when the reckonin's cast up. I'd leave ye behind wi' Steve, Nell, but I believe th' fellow's in love wi' ye and might forget's duty."

"Steve Carr?" cried Nell, and as her wide eyes met his level ones she colored deeply. "I tell ye, Ed Davies, but one man of all I ever knew is man enough to make a woman o' me, and 'tis not Steve Carr."

"Well, well, comrade, let it be then. But the ships ha' got me worried, I confess to ye, girl. Come back to camp, and get ready for the march. 'Twill be a hard road for ye, Nell, and I wish——"

"'Twill be no harder for me than for you," she replied spiritedly. "But hard or not, if ye dream o' ordering me to stay, wake up! I'm wi' ye to the end o' the venture, since I begun it along wi' you."

LITTLE as he desired any feminine influences in the last stages of his quest, there was a splendid loyalty and resolution in Nell Clark which made him heartily wish for a hundred more of her kind. Then he would have brought to issue at once the chafing bitterness that existed between the nominal leaders of the expedition. As it was, he needed every man available, and already the reduced crews for the ships and the town garrison had brought his force down one half.

"So ye shall," he told her with a bright smile. "And I elect ye my own bodyguard against treachery in our own ranks. Now get ye Goliath to help ye collect necessities for the march. He can carry half yer share as well's his own. He's an ox for strength."

Davies strode away to speak to Steve Carr concerning the bestowal of the loot taken from the town. As he turned out of the square he heard Nell's voice raised shrilly behind him, and then a long-drawn shriek of mortal agony that turned him about and sent him running up the narrow street where Nell had gone. In a wide garden, before a house of some pretension, he came upon L'Escuyler with two of his men, and some other things.

As he appeared he saw Nell snatch out her pistol and fire point blank at one of the Frenchmen. The man fell with his face blown away, and his fellow leaped at Nell with his cutlas raised. Davies got his own steel interposed when Nell's life seemed to be forfeit, and the man sagged to the earth like a burst sack of corn. And L'Escuyler stood staring in frank, open-eyed amazement.

In front of him an Indian lay face downward in a cactus, bound hand and foot, with a check-rein arrangement from his neck to his heels that kept his chin up and his face turned full upon an Indian woman tied to a tree before his eyes. Great stones lay upon the tortured man's hollowed back; blood trickled through the fleshy, spiked leaves of the cactus.

To each of the woman's earrings a seaman's boot had been hung, and the boots were filled with stones; the ear lobes were

dragged down until they hung level with the woman's shoulders. The Frenchman stood, as he had been surprized by Nell's cry, with his knife drawn, and the pleasant task he had been interrupted in was evident by the cruel tracery he had sliced upon the woman's breasts.

The woman was speaking to her fellow sufferer in low, intense tones, and though her eyes were bright with agony her words seemed to be for the encouragement of the man. He, from his own supreme torment, gazed upon her sufferings with wavering resolution.

As Davies stepped forward and seized L'Escuyler's arm the Indian uttered a howl in Spanish.

"Zere!" exclaimed the Frenchman, shaking loose from Davies. "Ze peeg he speak at last! Now we shall hear somesing, yes?"

"You'll hear something, yes!" snarled Davies, worked up to a pitch of murderous anger by the scene. "Nell! Cast those two loose and see what you can do for 'em. L'Escuyler, draw, ye foul swine! I ordered no cruelties, an' ye disobeyed me! Draw, or I'll split ye as ye stand."

"Ah, I disobeyed!" sneered the Frenchman, whipping out his cutlas readily. "Zat ees so, by gar! Eet is not good zat a pirate should obey a *ma'm'selle* in *culottes*, no! I keel you now, Ed Davies, an' zere shall be no more softness in ze beezness."

Without warning he hurled himself upon Davies with cutlas at point. Davies was less of a fencer than the Frenchman, but not a whit less sturdy as a cutlas fighter; and in the matter of ferocity, once aroused, he had few equals, no superiors.

He avoided the dangerous attack with the point by risking his left arm. The Frenchman's steel passed through his loose sleeve, ripping away the stuff and cutting Davies' forearm to the bone, slipping out under his armpit. Then before L'Escuyler could recover Davies whirled his own cutlas in a smashing overhand down-cut which the Frenchman in turn risked his left hand to guard while his own weapon was encumbered.

Down whistled the blade, encountered the raised wrist with a lopping thud, and the hand dropped.

"*Sang d'Dieu!*" screamed L'Escuyler, leaping back and showering red drops around. "I have ze 'eart of you!"

He came back with his point again, and this time Davies saw he could never turn it aside in time. Putting all upon the chance, he relied on his long arm and greater height to meet the deadly attack.

As the sword of L'Escuyler leaped at his throat, he straightened arm and steel in a lightning dart, leaned slightly aside, and felt the steel slip into the flesh of his breast. Then a great weight fell upon his sword arm; blood spurted along his blade and reddened his hand, and L'Escuyler fell at his feet, transfixed through the lungs, and the cutlas broke off under his weight.

The stricken man coughed chokingly and cast a look of bitter hatred upward at Davies as he bent over him.

"You shall see ze gold now, but you shall nevaire touch heem!" he gasped. "Ze devils of forest an' ze lake shall twist ze insides of you, ze savage shall have ze woman of you, an' ze soul of you shall——"

With his curse half-uttered the Frenchman died, and one turbulent factor passed out of the band. The witches' caldron had started to boil; the scum was rising.

"Nell, come bind up these scratches," rasped Davies, panting and dry of throat. "What ha' ye learned o' these Indians?"

"The woman's a queer sort o' woman. She likes not to talk!" quoth Nell, swiftly dressing the wounds in Davies' chest and arm with soft moss plucked from the garden. "But the man says he was servant to L'Escuyler long ago; now he is the servant to the Don who lived here when we came. L'Escuyler tortured him and his wife to make them tell where that gold ye seek vanished to, for the Indian vanished too, that day, and should have knowledge."

"H'm! Says he so?" grunted Davies, peering keenly into the Indian's face. "—— me, but I believe I recall 's face. Look to them, Nell. Make 'em follow us through cajolery. They mayhap will prove of service. I'll take one more look seaward; then we march."

## XXVII

NELL secured the doglike devotion of the two Indians not by cajolery so much as through sheer gratitude. With all a woman's tenderness, plus a man's steadiness, plus again the cold-blooded utility of the hardened campaigner, she had dressed their cruel hurts and revived them so that they had gladly marched with the column into the forest when Davies, after a

last uneasy search of the sea for the tardy ships, gave the word to advance.

"They ha' no heart to stay so long as our men remain," Nell told Davies with a laugh.

She had just seen the Indians trot along ahead into the jungle, finding paths where no paths seemed to be, proving their sincerity by waiting whenever they passed on too quickly until the head of the column appeared. Not two minutes before, Nell had run forward to overtake them, as they had been lost sight of for longer than usual, and demanded of the man a vow of intentions. She had made herself entirely clear, for she spoke Spanish like a Spaniard, and the Indian had passed his whole life under the Spaniard.

Both man and woman prostrated themselves before her, and her hands tingled yet from their fervid caresses. It amused her. Thus she laughed as she told Davies of the incident.

"It looks as if ye made friends twofold when ye lost a captain by the steel, Ed," she said. "The gentle savage tells me that the Indians on the lake shore and in the islands in the lake are uneasy and chafing under the Dons. Trouble goes abroad in the country by us as well as for us."

"Plague on the trouble for us ashore," Davies replied sharply. "That we can face, Nell. 'Tis the ships that ha' not played their part."

"Never fear for the ships. Is there not a hundred matters that mayhap to delay 'em? Th' dogs rambled ashore to hunt, or guzzled too deep o' the rum, or—who knows?—it may be that th' salty blades caught sight o' a wench or two friskin' through the trees. Cast off this mood, Ed. 'Twill never help ye as we go."

"I will. 'Tis mad o' me, Nell. But never ha' I been able to sink out o' mind thoughts o' that persistent king's ship that we slipped in the Brazil reefs. 'Twas that alone made me uneasy."

"Blood an' bones!" swore Nell, staring at him in amazement. "An' do ye believe any bulldog would keep the sea so long and never show 's self?"

"Not *any* bulldog," replied Davies thoughtfully; "but that one could and would. Did he not carry on at Cook's heels? Ha' they not lost a couple o' ships to him? Ain't Kestral aboard o' the cruiser?

"——'s blisters! 'Twas my one mistake o' the cruise so far! But I thought as ye do, Nell. Never did I look for king's ship to carry a chase around the world."

"And do ye know he has? Here, take a swig o' my bottle. Ye ha' need o' stiffening in yer tripes, Ed. —— me, but I think the killing o' L'Escuyler gave ye shivers."

THE evening was drawing on when a halt was called. The Indian guides appeared unwilling to go on; the rear of the column straggled up, visibly uneasy about the darkening forest. As they came up, Davies remarked that the numbers seemed diminished.

"Aye, half a score or more," Swan bellowed.

He had commanded the rear.

"Dropped like rotten sheep, they did. Some o' yer own dogs out o' the *Cadiz*, Davies. Never a shot, nor never a spear. Dropped dead o' fright an' laziness, they did."

Davies scowled blankly, for the implication was plainly induced out of spite. But the facts called for explanation. He spoke to Nell, and she in turn held a long discussion with the Indian woman. The man had vanished into the forest the moment Swan concluded his report.

"The woman says ye need not pass in sight nor sound o' Rivas, Ed, so why trouble about it?" Nell said. "She says her man is bound to guide ye aright if ye let him, and he wants to march for the lake shore where ye lost the gold. There's naught o' loot in Rivas, except maybe a few family pieces."

" 'Twas beside the lake across from an island we lost the treasure, Nell. The island o' Omotepe, 'twas, and that's nigh to Rivas."

The Indian woman spoke rapidly to Nell.

"She says no," Nell translated. " 'Twas the island o' Solentiname y' saw, and not Omotepe. 'Tis at the southern end o' the lake, Ed, and far from Rivas."

"Well, what says the Indian himself?"

The guide suddenly appeared from the jungle, his dark face wearing a puzzled expression as he opened his hand and showed Davies a tiny splinter of reddened wood, pointed at one end and wound with raw cotton at the other. Nell interpreted his report.

" 'Tis what killed th' lads back yonder!" she said. "He took the dart from the throat o' one of 'em. He says it's no weapon o' Nicaragua nor o' Costa Rica, but more o' a kind used in Panama and Venezuela."

Davies walked aside to ponder over the fresh evidence of some mysterious influence at work to defeat him. One thing seemed certain: he must get his men out of the forest as soon as possible; and that meant either the lake shore or the town. He rapidly cast up a balance, decided to try out the Indian's knowledge and sincerity, and returned to the simmering band of seamen.

"How far lies the shore o' the lake?" he asked.

The distance was but an hour's march out, and the light above the dense foliage of the forest trees might last that long.

"Forward, lads!" he ordered, swinging up his own pack and arms. "An hour brings ye to open water and a shore free o' trees anyhow. Sooner we sight the lake, sooner ye feast full and sleep in snug security."

Far back over the treetops rumbled a sound like thunder. Seamanly eyes glanced at the sky as the men trudged on into deepening dusk, but the skies were clear, the trees barely moved in the whisper of breeze.

" 'Twas great guns," replied Davies to Nell's anxious query.

She saw his face light up after one dark moment of doubt.

" 'Twas the signal agreed on. The rogues lingered full long, but they'll anchor off the fort before dark."

But the guns, if the rumbling thunder were indeed artillery, seemed to keep the forest in a dull blanket of sound for overlong. Again the dark doubt settled in Davies' eyes, for even echoes could not account for the repeated rumblings. He was on the point of calling a halt and despatching a party back to the coast to investigate.

His resolve was changed in startling fashion by an unearthly howl that rang out behind them, and the rear-guard plunged forward into the column, openly and unashamedly terrified, led by Swan, as staring of eye, as slack of mouth, as any.

"The forest's full o' devils!" he bellowed, glaring over his shoulder in palpable fright.

His men burst in among the others like scared sheep seeking shelter in company.

"Devils?" sneered Davies, confronting Swan. "Since when ha' two devils ceased to agree? Take thy men back, man, and——"

A man at Swan's side dropped in his tracks without a cry. John Cook, openly jubilant at Swan's terror, uttered a guffaw at the leap backward of his onetime crony now turned enemy. The laugh was shut off in his throat when one of his own men stumbled to his knees and thence to his face, clutching for a moment at his breast before lying still in death.

Not a sound had been heard. Death had simply come out of the forest gloom and taken two men as a man might pluck a puff of thistledown.

"Here, boy!" Davies called to the Indian. "Lead me to the place whence came this death, or die yerself. 'Tis some o' the Indian's tricks."

The Indian and his woman chattered in fright, but through all the fear ran a current of sincerity.

"They deny that 'tis Indian work, Ed," Nell said. "The man says 'tis some strange forest people, and he knows naught o' these tiny darts that kill wi'out sound or wound."

The uneasy seamen were milling around in rising confusion, only John Cook appearing less troubled than the rest, and even his face wore a look of uncertainty. Davies glanced over his band and mentally counted them. He made out a woful shortage in numbers since starting for the lake, and hesitated before putting it down to the vague light of the darkening jungle.

But one thing he was sure of: his men would face no more forest marches at night unless that lurking death were discovered and vanquished. The task appeared hopeless. The lake was near.

He ordered the advance again, led the way, gave heed to his guide and none to his rear for very fear of increasing the terrors of his men, and at long last burst through and came upon the shore of the lake in the first darkness of night.

"Light you fires and eat," he ordered.

Then when great camp-fires blazed and men huddled about them almost too uneasy to eat, he called Goliath and Nell aside.

"Tally the men," he said briefly. "You, Nell, take the landward half of the fires; you, Goliath, the shore side. By the horns o' the bull o' Bashan! I seem to note many an absent face!"

"Ah know 'tis so," grinned Goliath, and his huge frame shook with mirth. "Suah Ah seen plenty ob Cook's mans slip off an' stay behin' when we started, sar! Dey go back to de fort."

"Yes, Ed," Nell put in with animation. "I saw them. I thought you knew. Didn't you note Cook's face when he saw for the first time the face o' Steve Carr?"

DAVIES glared from one to the other. He had entirely overlooked the fact that Cook supposed Carr to be still on Aves, or a king's prisoner, or dead from hanging at Port Royal.

Now he saw why Steve had protested against the command given him. His voyage had but one object primarily—the killing of John Cook for his treachery. Cook would desire much the same end with regard to Carr. Ed now saw Cook, himself intent upon his own quarrel with Swan, sending back some of his men to visit his vengeance upon the upstart commandant of the captured fort.

"Count 'em!" Ed snapped. "Bring me the tally."

In half an hour the feast was cooked and eaten half-raw, the men finding comfort in mere fulness and the sight of open water. Nell brought up the count of men, Goliath's as well as her own, and Davies whistled in bewilderment.

"And all o' the missing men are made up o' Cook's and the Frenchmen," Nell remarked. "You killed L'Escuyler and flouted Cook to some purpose, Ed."

Davies sat in deep thought for some minutes. He stared into the blazing fire, then away across the lake, lying placid and shadowy before him, with never a hint in its flat bosom of treasure or death.

Behind him the gloomy jungle rolled. Beyond that lay the great sea, the town, his ships, his world when once he had solved the riddle of those ass-loads of yellow gold, vanished like the mists in the space of a night.

"Aye, Nell," he replied at length, rising to his full height, "I did all to some purpose, no doubt. Do you keep near Goliath, lass. I'll make the purpose good, never fear, but 'twill be no performance for you. I'll ha' somewhat to tell ye in the morning. Sleep safely, girl. Ye ha' a good guard in Goliath."

He stalked away and called the Indians. They accompanied him into the black forest amid the muttered fearful comments of the men, and together they made a detour and reached the lake shore again beyond a low hillock over which a round moon was rising.

Far out on the water, in a broadening beam of mellow light, a hundred tiny black specks seemed to dance. Davies regarded them with a sailor's eye, then turned abruptly upon the guide.

"Boats?" he snapped.

"Canoe," replied the Indian in one of the few words of English he knew. "Go island."

"What for?"

"Gold!"

Davies stared at the man in speechless question. While his doubt was yet unsolved, from the direction of the camp came howls of fury, an ear-cracking scream, and the explosion of a gun.

## XXVIII

THAT was a brave sight that Davies burst upon at the edge of the camp. In his first glance he saw murderous intent, and he sprang over to Nell Clark, thrust her into the arms of the Indian, and sent her protesting away.

Then, detecting the giant figure of Goliath leaning nonchalantly against a tree, outwardly unconcerned but nevertheless gripping fast a cutlas and pistol, he slipped around through the bushes and joined him. The entire camp seethed with fighting, cursing, snarling men; the grass was littered with dispersed fires and sprawling men who lay in attitudes of peculiarly permanent sleep.

"What a fiend's name's this, Goliath?"

Goliath grinned broadly, licking his thick red lips.

"Dat's de sta't ob de finish, cappen," he chuckled. "See de brave lads a-slicin' demselves into li'l bits! Dat's how de good Gawd ob de white man set to wuk a-evenin' t'ings up, sar."

"There's blood on th' moo-oon! Raw-aww-awk!" screamed Bravo, swinging head downward from a limb over the thick of the fighting.

Davies peered through the moon-shot forest gloom and soon realized that his own lads of the *Cadiz* were opposed to the combined bands of Cook, Swan, and L'Escuyler in the main; but at one side separate, smaller combats had developed, and in them he saw Swan's men and Cook's men at rubbers in earnest, and their leaders themselves locked in a death grapple. Already the fight had gone too far to be

stopped by any human order; it might be decided by the addition of a stout arm or two on either side.

Impatient though he was to investigate the purpose of the canoes on the lake, Davies nevertheless found time to think that this unexpected quarrel could easily simplify matters for himself and his loyal lads. But the reason for it all was a mystery. He hesitated before joining in to ask Goliath how it started.

"Dat's de myst'ry, cappen," grinned the black. "Fust dey begin a-chatterin' 'bout de forest debbils, den somebody say es 'twas nuttin' but some trick ob yours, sar. Dey say, whar you gone all alone wid dem Injuns? Dey ask whut de Frenchman done to git kill?

"Den Missis Nell she yell de black lie at Swan, who say yo' too much white-libbered 'cas you already curse him when ye shot de soldier, and maybe you hav secrets dat yo' keep from de res'. So dat remin' Cook ob Missis Nell's bein' hyar, an' he grin an' step for'ard to grab her. I watch mighty close, but she say wait.

"Den Swan he 'clude to hab a tussle hisself, an' dar yo' is, cappen. Dem two cappens butted inter each odder lak rams, an' fo' I c'd shout all han's is mixed up lak langrage iron."

"Hold a while then," said Davies.

He was keenly scanning the entire scene of battle, which was lit up increasingly by the full moon rising clear of the trees. Behind him lay the placid lake, and though he could see an end of Solentiname from where he stood, he saw no canoes.

In the clear space between forest and shore, a natural amphitheater of half-moon shape, the ground was trampled and darkened in patches by fallen men or the blood that ran from men still fighting. And the circumstance that lent a touch of ghostliness to the scene was the absence of shots, pistol or musketry; the fight was waged with steel alone, except where men discarded all made weapons and resorted in the final test to teeth and claws.

Without seeing her, Davies was aware that Nell had slipped away from her Indian escort and was crouching at his side, panting with excitement. He was too intent upon something happening which puzzled him to give her a glance. He patted her on the shoulder to let her know he was aware of her presence, then with a curt exclamation he muttered:

"There! See Goliath? Did ye see it, Nell? Five men I've watched back there by the trees, fall one after t'other wi'out a blow struck at 'em to the sight. D'ye mark how the rascals stop their fighting a spell and glance in uncertainty where th' dogs drop?"

"Aye," Nell uttered tensely, "and more, too. Can ye see naught more, Ed?"

Then she laughed shortly, and added:

"O'course ye can not see what I see, knowin' Cook's lads imperfectly as y'do. Hark. Every one o' yonder rogues that ha' dropped like rotten medlars wi'out seeming cause is one o' the dogs who went in John Cook's own sloop, Ed. Look closely. Never a man o' thine falls thus."

"Dat ain't lak fightin' no mankind!" growled Goliath, his ebony visage gleaming in the moonlight, his teeth revealed in a wolfish grin, his great dark eyes wide with dawning fear. "Dar! See? Anudder drapped, an' 'tain't no man hittin' at him nudder!"

It was uncanny how men were picked off with such surety. Like the men who had fallen on the march, Davies surmised that these were victims of that hidden foe which even the Indian, with all his forest lore, had been unable to reveal. But one thing made him pause still longer before putting his own weight into the fight to bring it to a conclusion: Swan and Cook swayed in a deadlock.

On both faces stark ferocity had settled like a mask; Swan's beard was slavered with red froth; Cook's face was grim, cold, and bloodlessly pale. From the iron body-armor of each red streams ran down body and legs to the turf; and the fight was bound to go to that one whose muscles longest bore the terrific strain of the grip they were in.

Each gripped the other's knife-wrist in the left hand; each had twined his right leg about the other's; and there they swayed, like two stags, bearing with every nerve, fiber and heartbeat against the other's effort to overcome his resistance.

The main battle had already come to a point where a single fresh arm might decide it. The *Cadiz* men had fought stoutly until backed against the forest trees, then made such an unexpected stand that their foes wavered half-heartedly. Davies snatched a comprehensive glance

toward that direction, saw yet another man of Cook's crew drop, and snapped sharply:

"Now, Goliath! Give that devilish yell o' thine and into it. Finish the battle to an end, and rally our own gallant lads on th' shore."

GOLIATH leaped like a polished black engine of war into the thick of the fight, and the *Cadiz*' men rallied with a deep roar of jubilation. Nell Clark answered his yell, and would have joined him. Her Indians had gripped her, and bore her screaming out of danger, while Davies stepped forward with drawn cutlas to settle the other side-issues.

Swan and Cook he meant to prevent killing each other if he could, for he owed Steve Carr something for his loyalty, and the very finest reward he could offer Steve, he knew well, was to bring him face to face with John Cook in a fair field with no favor and no chance of interruption.

He stepped over prone bodies, swept aside men who stood agape at the single combat, noted with a sharp glance that terror had usurped the place of fury in many a face, and drew close to the conflict at a moment when it had taken on a phase which put it beyond his will to stop it.

Both men had dropped their knives, yet neither appeared to know it. Swan had sunk his head to Cook's neck, and above the iron collar the flesh was dragged in a red bulge by gnawing teeth.

His face an agonized mask of deadly hate, Cook twisted his own head until he caught Swan's ear in his own teeth, and there they were, slowly sinking to the turf, snarling very low, breath hissing through bloody foam, undying hatred in each eye.

Davies watched them with a feeling that, do what he might, the end could only be put off. These men bore each other a grudge too dire for anything short of death to pay it.

He tried to decide which of the two men he most desired to live, but could see no merit in either. Both were men who had counted upon being leaders in the expedition, after the dead Frenchman. As for himself, he had been the last in line of leadership, who now was first if ——

His brief cogitation was halted in startling fashion. A seaman from Cook's band, released from his own encounter by the advent of Goliath and the quick victory of the *Cadiz*' men, saw his captain's plight, and adjusted matters in his own way. With the silent leap of a panther, the seaman swung aloft his cutlas, made it whistle in a fierce down-stroke, and Swan's skull spilled brains and blood broadcast over John Cook.

Davies sprang forward to make an end of the bloody affair, when Swan's men hurled themselves growling upon Cook. Cook's lads uttered their yell of defiance, and plunged into the new mêlée. Cook was encompassed with foes, staggering on his weary legs, his life-blood pouring from him, yet with eyes ablaze with undying hate for all who came near him in his frenzy of blood.

"Back!" roared Davies, swinging his cutlas and leaping into the midst of the fighting mob.

Goliath was at his heels; Nell Clark, flinging off the Indians, looked to the flints of two great horse-pistols and screamed for Davies to stand aside to give her aim.

From somewhere in the nearest trees came a sound like nothing so much as a bestial human growl. It sounded like something carnivorous intent upon a bone shredded with flesh.

But it was unnoticed, except by a few, in the face of the Thing that darted from the jungle with a sobbing shriek, paused a breath while it glared around, then staggered, recovered, braced itself with a tremendous effort, and flung itself upon John Cook, gurgling, smeared with blood, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, to sink the fingers of two hands like the forepaws of a gorilla deep into its victim's throat.

Davies halted abruptly. Nell's pistols discharged, but the balls flew high and wide, and down from a tree tumbled another figure as uncouth as that Thing, while the forest resounded with a yell of fury from the tree and the glade echoed with the howl of a hundred terror-stricken seamen.

Two Indians, a man and a woman, edged nearer to Nell Clark, and upon their faces was an expression of mingled satisfaction and contempt. Davies sprang across the intervening space and seized the Thing that had attacked Cook. Cook sagged limply, and dropped dead on the grass as he was released; and into Davies' astonished eyes blazed the dying, triumphant eyes of Steve Carr.

## XXIX

IN THE dancing light of dying fires, bathed over all by the broad moonlight, Nell Clark and Davies knelt beside Steve Carr and received his husky, whispered message of disaster. The ships had come up from Salinas Bay truly, but in company with a victorious king's ship guided by a jubilant and vindictive Kestral.

"I'd ha' beaten 'em off, cappen, but for th' dogs o' Cook and the Frogs ye left me for garrison," panted Steve. "'Twas rank treachery from inside as beat me. Give up the fort an' town, they did, and all but trapped me for a hangin'. Look at me!"

The stricken man was indeed a sorry object. His clothes were caked with dried blood, his limbs and face were seamed and crossed with cruel wounds, his eyes were anguished, and his mouth twisted with unbearable torture; yet triumph rested in his expression. His eyes flashed just once as they met the troubled gaze of Nell, and his life slipped from his lips in a final pean of victory.

"So long, Nell, I paid John Cook f'r both of us, lass!"

Davies covered the dead man's face with his own kerchief, and gazed moodily at the scene of recent combat. The ground was littered with bodies; the air was murmurous with the curses of wounded men.

Over against the nearest tree a curious group of seamen stood at a respectful distance from a strange figure kneeling over another as strange who lay prone, and from the lips of him who knelt issued a low, mournful, crooning note which rose at intervals to a shriek of frenzied rage.

"Shall we see who's yonder?" suggested Nell, shivering.

"Aye, we'll see everything while the show's goin' on," Davies laughed grimly.

He seized her arm in a grip that hurt.

"There's one thing sure, Nell, and that's the destruction of all our plans back there."

He pointed toward the vast forest and the sea beyond.

"By signs, and poor Steve's report, the Don's at peace wi' th' old land once more, and by taking yonder town we're pirates again. More, that king's ship will aid in tracking us down now wi' all the cunning o' the Don at home here to make it devilish hot or us."

"So Ed Davies'll quit then?" cried Nell excitedly, gripping his arm in turn, and with a grasp no less convincing than his. "Ye'll turn tail and run from——"

"Not so fast, girl!" Davies laughed as they approached the group. "I said naught o' quitting. I said our plans back yonder were exploded. Ye learn but slowly if ye believe me that soft o' backbone. Come, let's see what's here first. We start within the hour and shall leave no uncertainties to dog our course as we go."

Striding through the muttering crowd, they peered down at the queer pair on the turf, and suddenly Nell darted forward, put her face close to the head of one of the nondescript strangers, and swung back to Davies with a gasping cry.

"Ed! 'Tis Doggett and Rando, or their ghosts!"

"Ye're mad, girl," Davies retorted, bending low to peer as Nell had done. "'Tain't in human bounds they could ha' won this far from Brazil's reefs."

The figures he stared at were as the figures of apes; the faces those of animals, or wild men. Naked but for a string of leaves, hairy, scorched black by tropic suns, scarred and skinned in unwholesome patches by thorn, spear, and tusks of beasts, each leathery skin but poorly covering the bony skeleton beneath, yet they were indubitably men, white men, and by the gunpowder fancies tattoed idelibly on arms and chest, seamen.

"By Judas, ye're right!" exclaimed Davies, and turned up Doggett's grim, hairy face with a hand beneath his chin.

Doggett growled bestially and raised a short tube to his lips, inhaling a deep breath. Rando, the man brought out of the tree by Nell's badly aimed shot, raised a weak hand and snatched away the deadly blow-gun.

"Ha' done, Doggett," he said raspingly. "'Tis but th' Schoolmaster. Tell him. 'Twas Cook as left us to the bulldog, Doggett, not he."

"How did ye come here, man?" demanded Davies, utterly at a loss.

Mystery seemed piled upon mystery in that eery lakeside glade.

"What ha' ye to tell? Ye're all but mutton, man!"

"Aye, he's carrion," growled Doggett, peering at the surrounding faces with the air of an animal cornered by dogs. "A

thousand mile we walked through jungle and swamp, only to come to this!"

"Walked!" exclaimed Davies incredulously. "Ye're mad as a loon, man. Speak o' no such walk to me, who's tramped the Isthmus."

"Not all the way, cappen," rasped Rando.

A fit of coughing seized him; he gripped his mate fiercely by the arm and bade him waste no more time but tell his tale. He sank back bleeding from the mouth, and lay panting while Doggett spoke surlily.

"Arter we run from the bulldog for fear o' hangin' we struck alongshore no'th," he said. "We come on an Indian a-huntin', and Rando bruk his neck, he did, wi' his hands, like that."

He snatched up a twig and illustrated with gruesome relish.

"We got a bow and arrers an' a long spear frum him. We must ha' walked a hundred mile or more, tearin' through thorn-bush, swimmin' rivers full o' bleedin' big halligators an' wadin' swamps a-squirmin' wi' snakes as long's th' bulldog's mainyard.

"Then we come on a village an' the Indians set out arter us. We slipped 'em in a bit o' morass, and they let us go. But one we caught as he passed, an' I done the needful that time. We got this blowgun from him, an' a pouch full o' these yer little darts."

He fumbled in his leafy girdle and took out a single tiny brown dart, the counterpart of the one the Indian took from one of the mysteriously killed seamen on the march.

"'TIS the last one," he snarled, and turned his face toward Davies with a vicious grin. "'Twas for John Cook, but Steve Carr reached th' dog first—may his soul fry in ——!"

"Yes, but how came ye here?" urged Davies impatiently.

"Livin' like savages, sleepin' in trees wi' one eye open, an' stealin' canoes when they was to be got. Once we stole a big pirogue wi' a sail, an' sailed along the coast for a month or more.

"Into the Caribbean we sailed, cappen, an' so to the Isthmus. Lived wi' Indians and just like 'em," Doggett chuckled; and his mirth was disquieting to any gazing upon his bestial face with its slavering lips and puckered brows drawn low over beady eyes.

His merriment shook him, and he wagged his grizzled head.

"Ho, yes, lads," he choked, "like Indians por ol' Doggett lived wi' his pal Rando. But we found out what ye'd gi' yer lights an' liver to know, Schoolmaster; didn't we, Rando, ol' buck? Livin' along o' th' Indians, we was; and they knowed where yer gold went, Davies!"

"Knot thy long tongue, man, and come to th' gist o' the windy yarn," cried Davies, with difficulty hiding his excitement.

Doggett chuckled again, and stared impudently up at him.

"Treated us like princes, them Indians did; didn't they, Rando? Why, ol' Rando's got a fat little snuff-colored wife; ain't you, Rando?"

"Rando's got a widow, you mean," put in Nell quietly, getting up from beside the prostrate man.

Doggett started up, glared at her venomously and bent over Rando, muttering to him to speak. It was useless; Rando was dead enough; and suddenly all pretense was flung aside by Doggett and he leaped back, reverting completely to the savagery that had always been close to the surface and had been brought out by the unimaginable torment of that tremendous journey from Brazil's reefs.

With his blow-gun half-raised to his lips he fumbled for his last dart. It stuck in his girdle for a second, and that second decided still another destiny in that doomed venture.

As he put the tube to his lips it was for a breath doubtful which was the destined victim; but swiftly the deadly missile was aimed fair at Nell Clark, the innocent slayer of Rando. With a roar of fury Davies leaped forward to place his own body between the weapon and Nell; like a black comet Goliath leaped with him, crashed one huge shoulder against Davies, hurling him aside, and the blow-gun sped its messenger of death as the giant black gripped Doggett by the waist and lifted him bodily from the ground.

For the space of three heartbeats Goliath poised the man over his head, every muscle of his splendid frame standing out like a cable; then the negro hurled him with a sickening thud against a great tree and himself tottered forward and sank to the turf with his loyal life oozing from a tiny poisoned puncture at his broad breast.

A great silence fell over the glade with Goliath's fall. It was broken at last by a low, bitter laugh from Nell. She knelt down and straightened the giant's limbs, crossing his hands over his mortal wound, then leaped to her feet with a splitting oath.

"By th' wounds o' ——!" she cried. "Don't tell me o' difference in men! There they lie, Carr and Swan, Goliath and Cook, Rando and Doggett, and scores o' dogs o' pirates, good, bad and all sorts, and th' crawling things o' the forest'll scoff 'em up wi'out respect o' persons! Goliath was a slave once; some o' t'others was captains, some brave lads, some mangy curs, an' all are carrion once th' life's let out."

She laughed harshly, and men shuddered at her wildly beautiful face.

"D'ye tell me there's a God who knows one from t'other? Pish! Look at 'em! A musket-ball or cutlas stroke, a fever o' th' swamps or a splinter o' brown wood—all mean death to a man, be he mean and meager like yonder shriveled pirate, or great and full man like Goliath.

"And Death—'tis the end. Saint or sinner, priest or pirate, nun or Port Royal strumpet, a shot or the splinter 'll make 'em all equal."

She shuddered violently, snatched off her silken scarf and laid it over Goliath's face, then seized Davies by the arm.

"Let's away from here, Ed. My blood's chilled."

Davies glared moodily around the glade, seeking the Indian. Neither man nor woman was to be seen. The scattered groups of his men also appeared to be fewer than should be, even accounting for the carpet of dead men broadcast over the turf.

There was not one of his former lieutenants visible, though the bulk of the remainder was composed of his own *Cadiz* crew. He bade Nell call the Indian guide, and stepped over to the nearest muttering group of men.

"——'s mirth!" he swore blusterously at them. "Art frightened at shadows now? Or dead men? Rally, lads. We march at once for fair booty an' the end o' the traverse. Call up the stragglers. Ha' done wi' this——"

"Ain't no stragglers, cappen," a man returned hoarsely. "What ain't here, livin' or dead, is headin' back for San Juan to save their scurvy skins by surrender. Hope ye'll recall who's friend an' who's false when ye light on that booty, that's all."

It required but a glance to determine that his force was reduced to a pitiful handful. The forest murmured with soft night noises; the moon swam high in the heavens; the broad lake lay to the left, the shore sweeping in a fair curve away to the south and east, with Solentiname dim and mysterious far out upon the shimmering waters. He called to Nell, impatient to march. She came up with doubt in her face which soon turned to confidence.

"The Indians ha' vanished, Ed," she said. "But I mind th' man said our course lay by the lakeside until we struck a small stream opposite to which a line of islands stretched from Solentiname a'most in to shore. I'm for going on, Ed. Stay here through the night an' ye'll ha' no men left by dawn."

NELL'S eyes were suspiciously swollen and dark, as if she had forgotten her assumed guise of a man and found relief in womanly tears out of sight of the rest. But as they started along the shore she swaggered in mannish fashion, interlarded her chatter with scorching oaths without reason, and showed Davies unmistakably that no softness found place in her bosom.

He smiled understandingly as he strode through the rippling waves where jungle met water and forced the march aside. He knew women as well as a man can ever know them, and lady or wench, Lucrece or Messalina, timid, mouselike chit or strapping, brazen grenadier-like hussy, he knew that deep down in them they all had a well-spring of feeling that must bubble out when occasion demanded.

And deep in his own heart he felt a growing conviction that matters were swiftly coming to a climax which would bring out the true color of everybody concerned, no matter what sort of guise it found them in. His own retreat rendered impossible, except to surrender, his force dwindled to a handful, all of even that handful by no means certainly dependable; more than a suspicion of things happening out there on Solentiname, where he wanted to make his search, and the disappearance of the Indians, whose loyalty might have been counted upon considering the service he

had rendered them; all these things added evidence to evidence that the outcome was beyond the ken of his mortal vision.

The band straggled on, subdued through sheer fear of the unseen and unknown. A strong force of Spanish soldiery, or even a pursuing body of king's seamen, they would gladly and with gusto have fought to a red finish; but that night march through the murmuring forest, the memory of those swift and silent deaths that had come from the trees before the revelation of the

I. Here we took the Spaniard.
II. Careened here and cheated the bulldog.
III. 'Twas here Cook fired into Swan.
IV. Hanged Badoes for stealing of a bit of leather.
V. Swan took his pinnace here.
VI. Overhauled the galleon of dead men here.
VII. Swan here.
VIII. San Juan. Here died L'Escuyler.
IX. Swan and Cook here.
X. Doggett and Rando and Goliath here.

identity of the blow-pipe-wielding foe, above all the tragic end of so many of the chiefs among them—Cook, Swan, Steve Carr, black, genial Goliath—was more than men of vast superstition and small intelligence could stand.

They muttered as they stumbled on, and some counseled following the example of those others who had deserted and returned to seek pardon at the fort; others whispered huskily that Ed Davies and the wench had caught the scent of the booty and must needs lead their loyal followers to it all in good time. And, as Davies himself had previously asserted to them, a sturdy rascal exclaimed now:

"Do as ye' a mind, lads. I'm f'r stickin' to the cappen. More o' ye as falls out, th' bigger our shares'll be."

Through the early hours of morning many small rivers were either waded through or marched around. It was striking off upstream to find fordage that hindered the march so painfully that broad day surprized them while half the journey remained to be covered. The road ahead was of a kind to induce dire imaginings, so dense was the jungle to the water's edge, so tangled the mangrove swamps through which the stream at which they halted ran. Men dropped arms and packs as they stopped, and flung themselves upon their burdens, utterly weary and heavy with sleep. Davies abruptly ordered a bivouac, compelling the drowsy rascals to stir themselves and make camp out of the glare of day; then, looking around for Nell, missed her.

She appeared out of the forest while he was chopping brush for couches with his cutlas, and with a dancing light in her dark eyes told him in low, excited tones:

"I ha' seen the Indians, Ed! Sh! They're for us, man. Listen. The man says we must push on. A league this side o' the San Juan River that runs to the Caribbean he says ye shall see what ye came for.

"But 'tis not for us, Ed. That he told me with sorrow in's eyes, and as he spoke he touched his own scars and his woman's wounded breasts. But, hist"—she glanced furtively at the sprawled seamen—"th' man's left a canoe in a thicket not fifty fathom distant from here, and you and I may steal away and even now mayhap can seize a share enough for ourselves."

"Fool's gossip, Nell!" growled Davies angrily. "How may two get what two-score shall fail at?"

"Look!"

Nell snatched at her belt and produced a heavy circlet of dull gold.

"Such as this may be taken where an army might not spirit away gold in ass-loads! The Indian woman gave me this."

Davies strode back and forth nervously, his strong fingers clenching and unclenching as if loath to grasp something and as loath to let go. He arrived at his decision presently, and rejoined Nell over the fire

where their meat was broiling. With a hard grip on her shoulder he said quietly:

"Lass, I'll put ye in the canoe wi' a stout lad as'll see ye safe to th' sea. As for me, 's long as a bold comrade sticks wi' me I'll play the game to the end. Here I ha' yet twoscore o' sturdy rogues, wi' steel and powder and shot; who dares say all's lost?"

"And dare ye hint o' my running away then?" cried Nell hotly. "By Satan! Ha' ye seen aught o' fear in me in all the cruel work back yonder? Ha' done! I did but try ye, Ed."

Davies smiled softly across the fire at her. He took a gobbet of raw meat away from Bravo, the parrot, and stuck it on a twig to broil, and caressed the bird's gaudy poll.

"Till the end o' the venture then, Nell," he said quietly.

"Ha, ha, ha-a-a-ah! Blood an' bones! Ra-aw-awk!" screamed Bravo, gripping Davies' finger in revenge for the loss of the piece of meat.

THE camp was silent in slumber until mid-afternoon; except for a solitary sentinel and the dozing parrot all were still as dead men. A brown head was raised stealthily above a thicket, and a pair of piercing black eyes surveyed the sleeping bivouac of the gold-seekers. At sight of Davies and Nell Clark the dark face assumed a hideous scowl; it changed slowly to a softer expression, which melted again into sorrow.

The head vanished, and the camp slumbered until evening drew on, cool and shadowy. Then, as he had ordered, Davies was awakened, the report given to him that all was quiet, and the men sprang to life, alert and refreshed, to resume the march.

Until midnight they marched, keeping to the shore where possible; then in front of them a light flickered in the trees, a startled shout rang out, and a musket blazed forth, to be followed instantly by pandemonium.

## XXX

"BACK to back, lads, and face all sides!" roared Davies, confused by a ring of great fires that suddenly blazed high as if by magic.

Half-blinded by the glare, the startled seamen stood stoutly enough while a flight of arrows played sore mischief with them, and fired a crashing volley of musketry into the leaping shadows. Then while they were hampered by the cumbersome operation of reloading, a great rattling and clashing of steel resounded, the snort of horses, a sharp word of command in Spanish, and through the smoke of fires and powder a body of steel-clad horsemen charged, bearing down brushwood and hurling aside cane stems as a great ship divides and crushes down the seas.

In a moment the battle developed into a savage mêlée of desperate hand-to-hand combat. The snorting horses added terrors to the long Spanish swords which gave the seamen, fiercely though they fought, small chance to show their best.

Davies, fighting like a fiend, endeavored to keep Nell behind him; she in turn fought him to keep where she might do her part; and a tall Don pressed his horse through the clashing battle to reach them. Davies was backed to a dense thicket, gripping Nell by the arm, as a terrific onslaught of the horsemen mowed down the seamen and swept them into disastrous retreat; with the end of all things in sight, he hoarsely bade the woman slip through the forest while yet there was time and seek safety. He bent down and pressed a hot kiss on her lips, laughed joyously as she cursed him, and turned to meet the tall Don's attack.

Under his sword-arm a pistol roared, the horse went down, and he felt Nell's moist hand upon his own; her smoking pistol fell across his feet, and she tugged fiercely at his arm.

"Quick!" she panted. "Quick, Ed! Th' Indian's wi' us!"

As he plunged through the jungle growth which seemed to dance and writhe before him like a thing alive while the fires yet blazed behind, led by touch of Nell's hand as she in turn was led by the dark shape ahead, Davies heard a sound off to the left which his seaman's ears could never mistake. It was the sound of heavy boats on the shore; and the clamor of many voices indicated the landing of men, Spaniards.

"They come too late, Nell," he laughed grimly. "The Dons' horsemen ha' done aplenty already. —— me, but I'll go back——"

"Hasten, fool! There's naught but th' death of a madman back there. Did ye not see the last o' yer lads flyin 'in th' dark like a bat o' ——?"

She tugged savagely at his sleeve.

IN THE gray dawn of another day Ed Davies and Nell reclined in a leafy covert beside the San Juan River. Beside them lay several gourds of water, a piece of smoked kid and a string of grass threaded through a dozen lumps of Indian bread. From time to time a brown face peered in upon them; at less frequent intervals a brown hand and arm was thrust through the screen of cane stems to deposit an addition to the stores.

" 'Tis a sorry end to a brave venture, Nell," smiled Davies, munching a breakfast of smoked meat and bread. "I ha' a great mind even now to take thine innocent Indian by th' neck an' squeeze's life out. 'Twas he who let us blunder into yonder ambuscade, by Satan! And th' dog had said not twenty-four hours afore we should set eyes on them twelve ass-loads o' yellow gold."

"And I tell ye th' Indian's true!" exclaimed Nell with fierce loyalty. "Ain't I a woman? Can another woman deceive me? Did I not nurse the Indian's woman an' cure her hurts after ye killed the Frenchman to save her life an' her man's?"

"Aye, Nell," smiled Davies quizzically. "I ha' no more doubts ye're a woman, for all yer——"

"Never mind that now," interrupted Nell, coloring in spite of herself. "This I know: Th' Indian tried to save us both for what we did for him. Was it fault o' his ye wouldn't take the canoe as I told ye he wanted? An' when we fell into the ambush, wasn't it th' Indian as hauled us out?

"An' who's hid us here, wi' stout canoe at hand? Who's bringin' us food and water at risk of his life? The Indian and his wife, Ed Davies! Shame on ye!"

Nell turned on him with a gesture of anger. Davies lay back, watching her with a humorous glint in his eyes. All the calamities of the voyage had never forced that glint utterly from them, though at times it had not been quite so humorous.

The girl was busily employed upon something which every now and then caused her shoulders to squirm. In an inspired moment Davies leaped to his feet, and stood over her. She glared up at him in swift fury. Anger changed to embarrassment, then to confusion. He seized her hands in the grip he would have used on a refractory seaman.

"Sitha, Nell Clark," he said with intensity of feeling that made her lower her eyes. "Sitha! Woman ye are, as ye were made, for all yer mannish pretense. Now tell me how long ye've been nursing that wound in secret. By th' powers o' perdition, I'll not let ye go longer wi'out remedy. Let's look, lass. —— me! Where got ye that?"

Davies dragged her hand away from a blue-and-purple shot-hole in her chest. She stiffened once in protest, then abruptly relapsed into a submissive huddle of anguished humanity.

" 'Twas at the fort, Ed," she whispered.

Davies thought back. He saw that storming of the San Juan walls, and recalled that the bullets flew like hail for a moment.

"——'s mirth, girl!" he swore. "Why did ye not then stay wi' Steve Carr? A man's wound, is that!"

"I told ye once, Ed, Steve Carr was not——"

A rustle in the canes stopped her speech. Cautiously, as some hunted animal might appear, the Indian writhed his way through the thicket, followed by his female companion. Both had a finger at lips; both maintained the attitude of creatures of the wild forest when danger threatens.

Davies had but a smattering of either Indian or Spanish. The two Indians spoke to Nell, and she conversed volubly.

When the Indian suddenly turned and squirmed into the jungle again, Nell told her companion the message that showed him the story of his venture, beginning, middle, and end—unless Fate ordained yet another climax, which seemed to him impossible.

" 'Tis time, Ed," she said, and gazed deep into his eyes as she spoke. "Forget thine asses, thy gold, thy castle in the homeland, and be satisfied wi' thy life, for 'tis the last offer ye have of it!"

Dumbly Davies rose and followed her. The world had been shown to him having neither foundation, structure, nor capital. As he gloomily stepped into an Indian canoe at the river brink and discovered that both his hands were full of food and water-gourds, and that Nell was so burdened, he opened his eyes to the truth, and saw the Indian and his wife as burdened as he had been, solicitously loading the canoe, yet ever casting apprehensive glances about them.

"He says to wait till ye hear a whistle, Ed," said Nell, interpreting.

The Indian woman passed a banana-leaf

bundle into Nell's hands, then followed the man into the forest after making a dart like a swallow and placing her flat palm on Nell's forehead in salutation.

"What o' yer wound?"

Nell laughed uneasily.

"I ha' endured it so far, Ed, an' can carry it on," she said. " 'Tis but a flesh wound, and looks worse than 'tis. So may yer fortunes be, an ye but stiffen yer guts, man."

Of a truth Davies saw little of promise in his fortunes. He was seated in a shallow dugout canoe with nothing of seamanlike apparatus such as he was used to, but only a stout, thick paddle in his hand, the counterpart of one grasped by Nell, and nothing beside but water-gourds, dried meat, and a banana-leaf bundle in the boat's bottom.

He gazed back toward the lake longingly, fixedly; but, bold though he had often proved himself to be, he saw nothing but suicide in an attempt to alter the rolling course of Fate.

It required far less intelligence than he possessed to decipher the riddle of the many recent happenings. His country and Spain had declared peace; that was proved by the story of Steve Carr, telling of the king's ship joining in with the Spaniards to recapture the fort of San Juan del Sur.

The few words of Spanish, or Indian he knew had enabled him to realize that some reason, which had induced the legitimate owners of twelve ass-loads of gold to keep it in hiding while Spain and England were at each other's throats, had now departed, and, with peace, the treasure might be taken down to San Juan for shipment without fear. Any qualifying amendment to that reason, as Davies conceded with a grim laugh, had vanished bit by bit, and finally, utterly, with that charge of Spanish horse.

He spoke to Nell of his thoughts in a low tone. She turned to face him with a softer look in her fine eyes than he had ever seen.

"All ye ha' lost, Ed, is something ye never possessed, or if ye held it 'twas but for a minute. Here ye ha' life, and—and Bravo, and——"

The parrot fluttered to her shoulder at his name and pecked at her lips, giving her opportunity to conceal the color that persisted in mantling her cheek. She fumbled at her feet in the canoe bottom, and uncovered the circlet of gold the Indian had given her. This she held up, and with it another piece, a belt or girdle, formed of golden plates; together not a fortune, but the value of a score of seamen's working lives, and insurance against many sorts of ill luck.

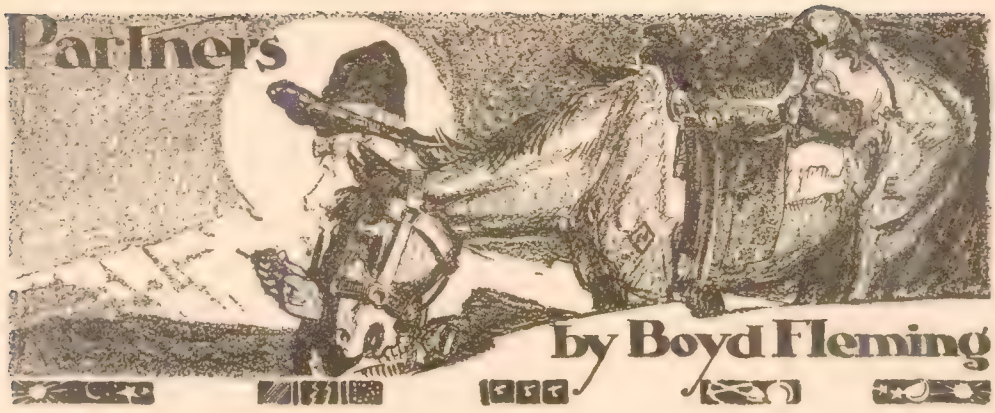
The sight of it whetted the rover's appetite. He felt at belt and side for arms, licking his lips. All were gone, all of his arms except a well-notched cutlas. He glanced at Nell; she laughed in his face with a light of deep wisdom in her eyes, and tossed the girdle to him.

"It seems to me that here's treasure enough, Ed. D'ye think I ha' spent eight years o' life among th' sort o' dogs ye found me with, and made 'em treat me as a man, wi'out feathering a nest o' my own? I ha' gold o' my saving, and 'twill serve, wi' th' profits o' these gauds, to start me in life as an honest woman, and——"

"Woman?" Davies queried with a whimsical smile. "I ha' a few bits o' pelf o' my own, lass——"

Above the nodding fringe of the river reeds a soft yet penetrating whistle sounded. It was repeated in a shriller note, as if to emphasize its message.

Nell seized her paddle; Davies mechanically followed her lead; and the canoe stole out into the stream, bound for the distant blue Carribean, while just beyond the jungle fringe, where lay the trail by the lake-shore to the Pacific, was heard the mellow, musical tinkling of a laden leading ass's bell.




*Author of "Tombstone Cancels a Debt"*

THE old man slid the huge revolver back into the worn holster at his hip and spat contemptuously at the writhing rattler at his feet.

"That's a sign o' luck, Old Slob," he observed to the ragged horse he was leading down the narrow trail. "You an' I may need it when we hit Canto. I've heard that Canto has got real delicate-like since we was there last. They may want us to get a haircut an' shave 'fore they'll let us wander around the landscape."

At the sound of the old man's voice the horse nudged closer, and he patted its dust-caked neck. It was a tall, raw-boned animal with a long, patient face. The deep chest and easy stride hinted of strength and endurance. In back of the heavy Spanish saddle was a small pack, from one end of which dangled a battered coffee-pot.

The old man, in many respects, was not unlike the horse. He was tall, raw-boned and ragged. His hair, crowding from beneath a flapping hat, was white, as was also his long beard. His face, what little of it protruded from the beard, was a leather-brown. The eyes were a calm baby-blue.

"Well, we can't stand here an' gab," he said after a moment, kicking the dead snake aside and pulling upon the halter. "It'll be dark 'fore we sift into Canto, as it is."

The narrow trail they were following suddenly twisted around an out-jutting wall of the cañon and dipped sharply downward. Far below, in a widened spot in the cañon bed, lay a cluster of buildings.

"There's Canto, Old Slob," the old man said to the horse. "Better blink the dust out o' your eyes an' shake out your tail a bit."

Man and horse paused at the point where the trail dipped and gazed down at the town. The man drew a canvas pouch from a pocket of his much mended overalls and extracted a handful of scrap tobacco.

"Might as well finish her up," he grunted as he divided the tobacco into two parts, one of which the horse nosed for eagerly.

After the horse had swallowed one of the portions the old man tucked the remainder inside his own cheek.

"I could never rightly figure out what satisfaction you get out o' rushin' through a chew that way," he snorted at the horse. "Why don't you drag it out a little?"

After a short time he lifted himself into the deep saddle and they descended toward the town. For a long time they moved in silence, the old man's eyes half-closed. The descending trail abruptly left the sunlight and plunged into shadow. The change from bright daylight to twilight was instantaneous, like plunging into a pool of cool water. The old man lifted his eyes slowly to the peaks above him, still flooded with sunlight, and then broke into slow speech:

"Now, Old Slob, I ain't goin' to make any promises this time—you know dang well I never keeps 'em anyway. The chances are I'll be a tryin' to make a two-legged whisky jug out o' myself 'fore I've been there an hour. But there's one thing we will do! We'll do all our dry shoppin' first. I ain't goin' to be stranded without plenty of 'baccy an' grub—not this time!"

The old man's prophecy in regard to his future actions turned out to be most remarkably true. Midnight found him, rather moist of eye and faltering of step, wandering between the roulette wheel and the bar at the Tin Dipper saloon. Now and then he would wipe the tears from his baby-blue eyes and reach a hand into a pocket of his new, bright blue overalls, where reposed the fast vanishing remainder of his capital, in the form of ten-dollar gold pieces.

The tears were not caused by the vanishing of the gold pieces, but were a form of condensation resulting from the liquid refreshments he found it necessary to take between every three or four spins of the wheel.

The crowd that thronged the sand-covered floor of the Tin Dipper consisted, mostly, of Canto's least peaceful citizens; therefore there is nothing remarkable about the fact that a loud-voiced argument should break out shortly after midnight. The remarkable fact was that it did not break out long before that hour.

The old man in the new overalls was returning from the bar to the roulette wheel when the crowd swayed before him, and there was a sudden roar of a gun. Before he could steady his moist eyes to a focus something whizzed over his head from the direction of the bar, and the single, big overhead lamp went out with a crash. At the same instant something descended upon his flappy old hat and he sank slowly to a heap on the floor.

IT WAS daylight when the old man once more opened his eyes. He found himself stretched out upon a mud floor—mud that had been packed and dried to the consistency of paving-brick. Placing one gnarled hand to his throbbing head he lifted himself to a sitting position. He looked about him and was not surprized to find himself in a stable. A few feet from him stood Old Slob, dozing with drooping head.

"Mornin', Slob," he said in a parched voice. "I reckon we've seen 'bout all o' Canto, eh?"

At the sound of his voice the doorway of the little stable filled with a shadow. He looked up quickly and found himself facing a man who wore a bright silver star.

"So you've decided to wake up, have you?" the newcomer grunted. "They sent me down to see if you was alive."

"And who might *they* be?" asked the old man slowly.

The other looked at him for a moment and then with a shrug said:

"I guess you've been away from Canto for some time. You just come with me and you'll find out soon enough. And mind you we ain't going to have no fuss about it!"

As he said this last, he tapped the butt of a gun at his hip. Without a word the old man rose unsteadily to his feet and followed.

The stable proved to be a small shed at the rear of an open space between Canto's one hotel and a saloon. The old man's guide shoved him toward a rear door of the hotel and, flinging it open, exposed a narrow stairway.

"The chief's office is on the top floor," he said. "Seeing there ain't only two floors, it won't be much of a climb."

A few moments later the old man found himself pushed into a small room, in the center of which a large, red-faced man was seated behind a small table. In back of the red-faced man, in chairs against the wall, several other men were seated. All of them displayed a bright silver star. His guide left him standing before the table and joined the others.

"I suppose you know why you are brought before this committee?" the red-faced man asked, after staring at the old man for a moment.

"I'm 'fraid I don't," the old man said, passing a hand across his dazed eyes. "I guess I had a little too much to drink since I hit Canto. I don't just rightly know anything. You boys might kinder tell me how the cards lay."

"You know that Canto has a law and order committee?" the red-faced man asked sharply.

"I ain't been in Canto in several years," replied the old man.

"Well, I'll explain," said the red-faced man. "This committee was appointed by the citizens of Canto to preserve law and order. A great many of our citizens have brought their families from the East, and there's a strong feeling against needless gun-play. In fact there's been considerable talk of closing up the gambling unless there's less disorder."

"I see," said the old man. "But what's this law an' order committee got against me?"

For answer the red-faced man turned to the man who had acted as guide.

"You'd better tell the committee what happened at the Tin Dipper last night," he said.

"Well," said the man, after taking a chew of tobacco, "there ain't a heap to tell. I was standing at the bar talking with Slim when the cussin' broke loose. I turned round just as this stranger shot down Tex. The bar-keep let a bottle fly at the lamp and Slim fetched this fellow over the head. That's as far as anything went."

The old man blinked his baby-blue eyes and stared at the speaker.

"Did you go over to see how Tex was coming on this morning?" asked the red-faced man.

"Oh, he's doin' pretty fair," was the drawling reply. "He was just winged in the shoulder. The boys got him fixed up as good as new."

"Well, you've heard the report of this member of the committee. What have you to say?" said the red-faced man, turning to the prisoner.

"Well, as I mentioned afore, I ain't got a very clear memory of just what did happen last night. I reckon, though, that I didn't do any shootin'."

"What makes you think that?" was the sharp question.

"W-ell," drawled the old man, "in the fust place they didn't give me time—an' in the second place this gent you call Tex would have been beyond any 'fixin' ' if I'd took the notion to shoot at him!"

The red-faced man opened a drawer in the table and lifted out a huge, old-fashioned Colt's revolver.

"Is this your gun?" he asked sharply.

The old man glanced at it and nodded.

"You had it when you were at the Tin Dipper?" was the next question.

Once more the old man nodded.

"I guess that's all this committee needs to know," said the red-faced man, with a grunt. "This gun has one empty chamber and there was only one shot fired last night at the Tin Dipper. You can be mighty thankful that Tex is in shape to be 'fixed.' As it is, this committee will give you a fine of three hundred dollars—and twenty-four hours to get out of Canto!"

The old man blinked several times and slid one hand into a pocket of his new overalls. He found one lonely ten-dollar gold piece.

"I guess you'll have to give me time in jail," he said slowly. "I dropped all my stake except this at the Dipper."

The members of the committee scowled and looked at each other. The red-faced man wiped the sweat from his face; the little room was almost like an oven. After a moment he rose to his feet, and, turning to the others, said:

"I appoint Jones, Sims and Hodge as a committee of three to decide what shall be done," he said. "They may use my bedroom to talk it over."

Three men seated along the wall clambered to their feet and made their way into an adjoining room.

IN A very short time they returned. One of them talked to the red-faced man in a low voice. The red-faced man nodded and, turning to the old man, he pointed to the door.

"You can now go," he said. "We give you twenty-four hours to get out of Canto. We have decided to take your horse and saddle instead of a cash fine."

The tall form of the old man suddenly straightened.

"You—you don't mean to say you're goin' to take Old Slob?" he cried. "Why—him an' me has been pards for years!"

"We give you twenty-four hours to get out of Canto!" repeated the red-faced man sharply. "The stage goes through at noon. You'd better go out on that. If we see you after twenty-four hours—or see you trying to take your horse—*we* will do the shooting! We've had enough of you outsiders drifting in here and trying to run the place!"

"Gents," the old man said slowly, his baby-blue eyes searching the faces before him, "I ain't so blind but what I can see how the land lays with you boys. You got to hold some one for this shootin'—an' I'm the stranger. But it ain't quite square to take away an old man's only partner. Me an' Old Slob has stood by each other for ten years—an' thinks a heap o' each other. We've faced death together in the desert, an' starvation in the hills. I'm an old man an' he's the only pard I got. Me an' him has been——"

"You still got twenty-four hours to scare up the three hundred dollars," broke in the red-faced man harshly. "You had better be at it if you think so much of that old crow-bait!"

Without a word the old man turned and left the room. His baby-blue eyes were dim and his hands shook. He gained the street and wandered slowly about, a weary droop to his big shoulders.

About noon the stage pulled up before the hotel in a cloud of dust.

From his position near the Tin Dipper the old man watched it with dull eyes.

The greater part of the population of Canto was there to watch it. The old man's eyes searched the faces of the crowd. He noted the man with the red-face and other members of the committee among the crowd. His eyes suddenly grew keen.

As the stage-door swung open and the crowd looked on expectantly, he turned and made his way swiftly to the little stable at the rear of the hotel.

ABOUT half an hour after the stage rolled out of Canto the red-faced man returned to the room on the second floor of the hotel, the room where the committee had met that morning. He flung himself lazily into a chair and placed his feet on the table. He was seated thus, smoking a huge cigar, when a member of the committee rushed in.

"That old mountain-goat has took his hoss an' cleaned out!" he shouted.

The red-faced man's feet came to the floor with a crash.

"How long has he been gone?" he snarled.

"Can't be much more than half an hour," asserted the other.

"Where in —— is all the boys?" was the next question. "You know darn well we can't lose that horse! There's only five horses in the whole place and we need one more for the committee—and we are going to get it! Where in thunder are the boys?"

"Slim an' Hodge lit out down the main trail and the rest went up the trail."

"That leaves you the only man left with a horse!" snapped the red-faced man. "What makes you boys think he took the main trail?"

"He couldn't have took any other. The cañon trail can be seen from all over the place, and ol' Pop Higgens has been watchin' it all day—he's expectin' his kid over from Blue Top. He says there ain't been a soul on the trail all day."

"There's the old Indian trail that leads over into the Martin Cañon country. He could have slipped along in back of the hotel and up the creek-bed without being seen!"

"He ain't took the Indian trail," said the other with a positive shake of his head. "I've had an eye on that, off an' on, all day. There ain't been any one over that trail in a dog's age. You got to get on to her from the creek-bed, an' the last time the creek was full she left a lot of soft dirt there. He couldn't make it without leavin' tracks as big as a house."

"You've looked to make sure?"

"I've looked till my eyes are sore. There ain't so much as a fly track!"

The red-faced man gave a grunt of satisfaction and puffed deeply at his cigar.

"It's lucky he hasn't gone out on the old Indian trail," he said. "Give him an hour start on that and we'd be out of it. After he got over the wall and into Martin Cañon country, he'd be safe. There's not more than a dozen white men been through there—but I'll bet that old goat is one of them. I'll bet he knows it like a book!"

"Well," said the other, "he missed his play then. He ain't took the Indian trail—I'll stake my neck on it!"

"He's a pretty wise old boy," said the man with the red face. "He knew he'd have to have at least an hour start to keep us behind until he got over the wall. He seen he couldn't get on to the trail without leaving tracks—so he made a run for it on the main trail."

"He's got a mighty slim chance," grinned the other. "There ain't a chance to turn off the main trail for thirty miles. The boys will run him down within two hours even if he throws away that pack he's got."

"You follow the boys down the trail," said the red-faced man with a nod. "I'll stay here and see that he don't double back in some way and hit the Indian trail—that may be his game."

"But there won't be a hoss in camp!" objected the other.

"Never mind about that," was the answer. "I'll stroll down the creek-bed with a rifle. I'll have his horse if he ever tries to cross over!"

A MOMENT later the red-faced man was alone. He listened for a moment to the clatter of hoofs as the other man flew down the main trail, and then slowly rose to his feet. As he did so a slight sound made him whirl toward

his bedroom door. He found himself staring into a huge Colt's revolver, behind which was the tall form of the old man in the blue overalls.

"Hold 'em up!" came the softly spoken command.

Without hesitation the red-faced man stretched his hands toward the ceiling. The mildness had vanished from the baby-blue eyes. They were as cold as an arctic sea.

"Turn around an' put your hands behind you—an' move slow!" was the next command.

The next instant he felt his gun removed from his hip and his hands were drawn together behind his back and fastened with a quick twist of a rope. The rope was drawn so tight that he almost roared aloud. The next instant a wad of cloth was crowded into his mouth and fastened at the back of his neck.

"Sit down on the floor!" said the old man.

With some difficulty, because of his hands being bound behind him, the other obeyed.

The old man looked about the room for a moment and then climbing to the table-top he moved a heavy lamp that hung from a heavy iron hook in the ceiling. He then jumped lightly to the floor and shoved the table aside, replacing it with a chair.

"Get up in that chair—stand in it!" he said to the man on the floor, helping him to his feet.

He then slipped into the bedroom and returned with a long piece of rope. Forming a slip-noose in the end of the rope, he tossed it over the other man's head and drew it snug about his throat.

"So far, so good," he smiled. "Now to get it over that hook in the ceiling."

"Mub-glub-m-murg!" spluttered the man in the chair through his crowded mouth.

"Shut up!" snapped the old man, as he flung the slack rope toward the hook. "I'm the only one that does any talkin' on this committee!"

He at last succeeded in throwing the rope over the hook. He drew it tight—so tight that the man in the chair lifted to his toes. He then made the loose end fast to the knob of a closed door.

"W-ell," he drawled, his task finished, "I kinder think you'll stay there till some one calls on you. You'd better not go to kickin' 'round a lot, 'cause that chair might slip out from under you. It might be the cause of your accidental death!"

The man in the chair only glared.

"Guess I'll have to be goin' now," the old man continued. "You see me an' Old Slob likes to get an early start when we take the old Indian trail. We only needs 'bout an hour to make us safe. We knows the Martin Cañon country like that book you was tellin' about."

As he said this he turned to the bedroom and gave a low whistle. There was a soft thumping sound and Old Slob, his feet wrapped in folds of horse-blankets, entered the room.

"I kinder had to muss up your bed a little," said the old man as he led the horse toward the door leading to the back stairway. "Old Slob gets restless sometimes an' stamps his feet—so I gave him your mattress to stand on."

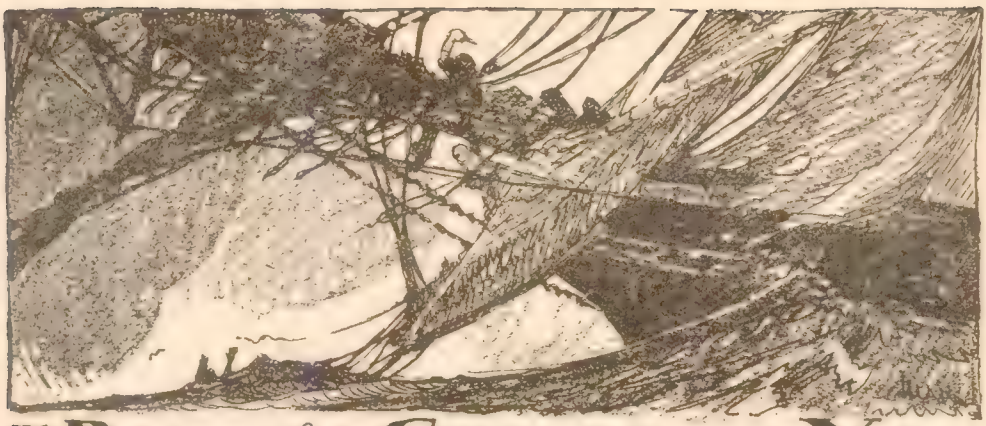
AT THE head of the stairs the old man paused and scowled.

"Old Slob, here's where you got to uphold your great reputation," he grunted. "Goin' down is a heap different from comin' up!"

The horse looked at the stairs with calm indifference while the old man listened for any sound from below.

"Well, I reckon she's clear," he whispered to the horse. "I've seen you make worse places than this 'fore now. If you have to set down an' slide, do it softly—an' not on me!"

Bracing the horse as much as possible with his shoulder he urged him forward. After much soft swearing and some sliding and scrambling they reached the bottom.



# The Bosun of the Goldenhorn's Yarn

by Bill Adams

A CROWD was down at Toxteth Lock, men and women; stevedores, loafers, and pier-head jumps, standing in the wind and drizzle. Toxteth is the last lock between the Liverpool docks and the river Mersey. In Toxteth the big clipper, Frisco-bound, was lying, awaiting the tide to take it to sea. At her fore skysail truck, the loftiest mast-head in port, blue Peter fluttered.

She came gliding through the lock, looking like a dainty lady, bright and slender. Her sides shone with fresh paint, and her standing rigging glistened in the sun, between the showers, with its coating of tar and varnish. Her brass work dazzled a man's eyes; and her teak chart-house, skylights and taffrail, scrubbed with pumice and oil and with three coats of varnish on top of the oiling, were a bright sight for the eyes of any man—sailor or 'longshore loafer.

There were hands aloft casting the gaskets free along her topsail yards. The anchor was coming to the hawse-pipe, and old Warren, the fellow the hands called "Wild-Eyed Parrot," was rousing a chantey. The breeze was coming fresh from outside, fluttering her flags and bellying her canvas. Fin Hansen was at the wheel; and at the galley door stood the half-breed cook, drawing the bow across his old fiddle. The stamp of the hands around the windlass, the wind, the flags fluttering, and the voices of the folks on the lock, who were watching the clipper to sea, all seemed to swing with the tune of Parrot's chantey.

"In Derry town there dwelt a maid—
Mark well what I do say—
In Derry town there dwelt a maid,
And she was mistress of her trade.
We'll go no more a-rovin' with you, fair maid.
A-rovin', a-rovin', oh, rovin's been my ruin—
We'll go no more a-rovin' with you, fair maid."

Standing forward amongst the crowd on the lock was the second mate's girl. She was a little thing with sandy-red hair and clear hazel eyes—a clipper-built slip of a girl. Clegg, the second mate, left the fo'csle head and climbed over the railing, and, standing on the beading that ran around the clipper's side, held with one hand while he bent over toward his girl.

The girl turned to old Mick Sinclair, the boss stevedore, who stood beside her, and smiled into his face. Mick put his big paws under her elbows and lifted her to Clegg. A whip of a breeze came over the river as she kissed him good-by; and as Mick lowered her to the ground she cried—

"There's luck to you, Willie—round the Horn with your skysails set."

Mick laughed and called—

"There's to make a bold sailor of ye, my boy, eh?"

And Clegg, climbing back to the clipper's deck, looked back and answered—

"Aye—a bold sailor it will be now."

"*The Bosun of the* Goldenhorn's *Yarn*," *copyright*, 1921, *by B. M. Adams.*

So the *Goldenhorn* went seaward for Frisco and round the Horn.

We towed into a piping norther when we came to sea, and sheeted home topsails, topgallants, and main royal. The packet got a touch of sea fever, as a harbor-weary clipper will, and away she went—footing it down the narrow seas and racing for the Western Ocean like a colt turned free to roam the open pastures.

When darkness fell we saw the flash of a shore light, far away across the water. It faded; and, leaving the land astern, we dipped to the long Western Ocean swells. The packet lifted her forefoot high, and, dipping low in the dark sea-hollows, threw the salt sprays far over her bows.

We had forgotten the folk who watched us seaward till the second dog watch came; and the half-breed sea-cook got his old fiddle out. Then we, away forward, heard him, bringing to mind the bright lights of home of a night-time and the faces of the folk on Toxteth Lock; so we went into the fo'csle and sat on our sea-chests and in our bunks with our legs dangling, and there talked of other ships and of ports all about the edge of the windy old sea.

When eight bells went we gathered beneath the bridge upon the quarterdeck, and, looking up, we could see the face of the mate, shining pale within the binnacle light—so that he looked like the ghost of a drowned sailor. We were glad when he called our names and we heard each other's voices.

The ship was riding easy and quiet, like a great fowl of the water. There was breeze enough to keep everything full, and, all sheets and braces being taut, there was no creaking of gear such as you often hear of a night upon a ship at sea. We could hear old One Eye, taking the wheel over, repeat the course—the course for Frisco and round the Horn—drawling it slow and easy—

"Wes'-by-sou', half-sou'—wes'-by-sou', half-sou' it is."

We could hear the lookout man, reporting to the officer on the bridge, sing out from the fo'csle head, slow and full of music—

"Al-l-l-l-l's we-l-l-l, sir."

And the mate muttered—

"All right."

Dawns and nightfalls came and went again aboard the outbound clipper. Some days she staggered under skysails with a creaming wake far astern, and the seafowl that followed her, wearying with her speed. Some days she lay with her yards upon the backstays and the cold, green sprays whipping over her as she beat into the head sea. At sunset time one evening we sighted an island—a purple, mysterious-seeming jewel—that stood above the crimson sea.

We picked up a fresh trade and sped down the tropic latitudes under all sail. We lay upon the Line in the steamy doldrum calms for a day or two, and, again meeting the trades, swept on a southerly course. With six topsails set and shining in the lightning flares we ran through a Plate *pampero*—the thunder rolling over us and the great raindrops glistening in the night's terrific glare like myriads of falling diamonds. With a southerly wind we felt the first breath of the Horn; and got preventer sheets upon the upper topsails, and weather-boardings round the taffrail.

And by and by we came to the Horn—black and blowing and cold—aye, bitter cold. Everything aloft was frozen. Bare hands to handle frozen topsails: bare hands and bleeding—and darkness and the sea terror over the waters. Always that moaning, moaning, in the night, that all men know who follow the sea in ships.

Twenty seamen sat within the clipper's fo'csle, some in yellow oilskins and some in black, all wet and shiny, bearded faces under dripping sou'-westers, wreathed in thick smoke. Men sat binding torn hands and hands rubbed raw with handling frozen canvas aloft—one with fingers crushed in a brace-block. They all sat waiting—waiting for the day; seafaring men outbound with a dainty-heeled clipper ship.

Morning came, and a Horn hurricane; and it snowed—a cold, white horror. Night came again, and the hurricane and snow. Life-lines were frozen hard, so that it hurt a man with torn hands to grasp them, and a sob would be driven down his throat by the yelling Horn winds. A topsail blew to ribbons, and up we went to lash its ragged ribbons on the spar; and came down again, choking for a chance to breathe in that great wind.

The sea lifted her head and roared across the deck, waist deep in the darkness.

Morning came, and the hurricane and snow.

Clegg went to the bridge and shouted to the mate—close in his ear—

"Five hands missing, sir."

And the mate said—

"All right."

What else could he say?

The hurricane blew on, yelling through the shrouds of that packet hidden in the snow and the spray, with her railing awash in the sea.

The mate fought his way to the chart-house, and, leaning in, shouted to the skipper—

"Wheel's carried away, sir."

And, looking up, the skipper said—

"All right."

What else could he say?

Day went like the night before it, and another night came with the same fury of wind and bitterness of cold. At nightfall a comber lopped over the waist and roared outboard to lee, taking the galley with it and the half-breed cookie, and his old fiddle too.

We ate hard-tack that night, and knew no warmth or rest. The big seas pounded her. We were aching tired, and soaked with the cold sea. Our bunks and bedding were gone overside.

The gale blew itself out by morning, and she lay rolling in the trough—her quarter boats and bridge gone in the darkness of the night.

Willie Clegg blew his whistle; for he was skipper now. Skipper and mate were gone when, unseen by any one, the bridge went.

We went aft to try to rig a jury wheel. Some went aloft to cut away rags of torn sail-cloth from the spars.

She rolled in the trough; no wind—just a Horn calm. No sky; nothing but a great coldness above and all around. Everything black—cloud and water; and a long, high swell to the sea. And always that far-away sound, that low moaning from under the sea rim.

After a bit the snow came again, hiding the world from us, falling in great flakes like a shroud and covering the decks inches deep.

Men's voices, calling from aloft, sounded clear and cold—as the snow looked. Day passed, and evening came again—the dog watch; but no fiddling from cookie's fiddle now.

All hands sat shivering in the gutted fo'csle; huddled on deck, crowding together for warmth. Some slept. Some bound their bleeding hands. At eight bells we went aft, standing under where the bridge had been. We heard the man at the wheel repeat the course—the course for Frisco and round the Horn.

"Wes'-by-no'th, half-no'th—wes'-by-no'th, half-no'th it is."

We heard the lookout man from the fo'csle head reporting to the officer of the deck, singing it out slow and filled with music—

"Al-l-l-l-l we-l-l-l, sir."

And Clegg muttered—

"All right."

We went back to the fo'csle, huddling together for warmth.

THE clipper lay in the sea trough, rolling like doom. Chains clanged against the masts, and spars groaned. I leaned out into the black night and listened to the sea moaning, and turned back to the fo'csle where the hands were huddled together. One Eye was whining a song—a chantey tune—

"Come all you young sailors wot follows the sea."

Toward midnight the swell got worse; and, lurching in the troughs, the packet rolled her railings under, groaning.

There was a sudden great crash, quickly followed by another; a grinding and tearing sound. Clegg shouted to cut away the wreckage. The fore and main masts had gone overside—ripped out by the rolling.

When morning came, still calm; but no snow now. There was the Horn, black as the sea and the sky. We stood on deck, all that were left of us, and stared at the Horn. It was snowing over the land; a thin shroud falling, and merging sea and land together.

Suddenly there was a shout from the lookout man, and we all turned to look.

Coming across the sea, a few miles on the port bow, was a green-painted steamer with two buff funnels. We could see the ripple about her forefoot. She was crowding the steam toward us. Some one spoke.

"One o' them Aberdeen White Stars—home-bound from the colonies. Thank ——."

There was no need for us to fly a signal. They could see—a dismasted clipper with bridge and boats and wheel gone overside, lying in the Horn troughs close inshore.

Coming close to windward on our port, she dropped a boat. We gathered at the quarter rail and waited. There was no need

for them to ask us many questions. One by one we piled over the railing and dropped into their boat. We did not trouble to ask them who they were—we were cold and wet and hungry, close inshore in the Horn troughs.

When the hands were all aboard their officer climbed to the clipper's deck and went to the poop, where Clegg stood alone. They spoke together for a minute or two, the steamer officer waving his arm and seeming to plead with Clegg; but Clegg shaking his head.

Coming back to the boat, the officer told his men to give way.

We went from the side of the old *Goldenhorn*—from her wet, rusty side and her gale-tormented decks. Clegg stood upon her poop, looking toward the land.

We drew near to the steamer and saw her name—*Damascus*, of London.

When we boarded her the hands of the old clipper went below for warmth, and food and life; but I stood upon the steamer's bridge with the boat officer and her commander. We gazed toward the clipper—the clipper bound for Frisco and round the Horn. The snow was falling, and slowly hiding her from view.

The boat officer spoke to his commander:

"He's her second mate, sir; he refused to leave her. 'As long as she floats,' he said."

The steamer captain spoke.

"A bold young sailor," said he.

Then I remembered the kiss that Clegg's girl gave him—to make him a bold sailor and take him round the Horn with his sky-sails set.

THE *Damascus* called at Montevideo and the Canaries. On the day that she called at Montevideo the *Goldenhorn* was posted "missing" at Lloyd's and the bell was rung for her.

When the *Damascus* came to her dock there was a slip of a girl with sandy-red hair awaiting her there. It was I who went ashore and spoke to her. She stayed around the dock till nightfall, and then went slow away.

Since the day the *Damascus* brought me in I have been shore bosun for the Aberdeen White Star; for I lost a hand that time we rolled in the trough off the Horn and can no longer follow the sea.

Each time one of their steamers comes in from the colonies and round the Horn there is a slip of a woman with sandy-red hair and clear though troubled hazel eyes to meet her.

Each time I go aboard and ask her commander a question.

Then I go ashore again and speak to the girl.

Each time she stays around the dock till nightfall, and then goes slow away.

# Men of the Night

## a four-part story part two

by Gordon Young

*Author of "Bluffed," "White Men," etc.*

***The first part of the story briefly retold in story form***

MRS. HELENA HOLDER LOUDEN, sister of Frank Holder, whose millions had been made in Texas oil, was giving a house-party; one of her many attempts to "break into" New York society.

One of the entertainers, a girl named Javotte, had attracted attention by her black-masked face and clever dancing. Although many speculated as to her identity, only Frank Holder knew. He had found her in some cheap cabaret and had fallen in love with her.

That night when Javotte went to her room she found a masked man concealed there who robbed her of her jewels. He warned her not to marry Holder, and Javotte was in terror lest her past life had been discovered.

"P'ease, p'ease tell me who you are," she begged in broken English; but the man refused to raise his mask.

While they talked screams sounded through the hall; another woman had discovered the loss of her jewels. Quick as light, the masked man slipped from the room and was gone. The crack of a revolver sounded as he shot out the lights, warning the guests to stay in their rooms.

Holder, thinking only of Javotte, hurried to her room and then brought her secretly to a tower chamber where she would be safe until he and a private detective could get her away next night.

During the day the black-masked man obtained admittance to Javotte's room and revealed his identity as "Black Wolf," a notorious character of the underworld.

Javotte, who feared he would betray her forced marriage to a gangster, promised to help him escape that night.

It was dark, without moonlight; and together they slipped down-stairs after the detective to the car which was to take Holder and the girl to the city.

With infinite quiet, Black Wolf overpowered and bound the detective; then when Holder appeared he had already taken his place as chauffeur.

Followed a mad ride through the night while Javotte, hysterical with fear, told Holder that the driver was Black Wolf.

The car drew up at a lonely spot, and the masked man opened the door.

"It's a good place for a murder," he murmured.

"But we'll postpone it," he continued.

He had seen the look of terror on Javotte's face.

"She really loves him," he thought; "and if so, why——"

Holder seemed as impassive as ever. He revived Javotte by fanning her slowly with a newspaper in which was an account of the murder of Javotte's gangster husband. Finally it caught Javotte's eye, and she became radiant. Holder had been trying to make her see it for ten minutes. With a corps of detectives in his pay, he knew far more than any one suspected.

IN THE library of a duplex apartment on the first floor up of the Wellington-Dane two fellows were discussing the marriage of Frank Holder to Aliza Cabrona, who had not yet been generally identified as the Cabronette or as Javotte Murilla.

In hastily taking a new name to live under after her flight on the marriage eve she had taken her mother's name of Murilla and kept it, though it was strongly suggestive of the other from which she fled.

One of the fellows talkatively concerned in the marriage was William Wingate, *alias* Billy the Dude. The other, a man of pessimistic garrulity, was Jerry Peete, who

divided his time between valeting, acting as chauffeur and blowing safes.

Billy the Dude, whose reputation as a second-story worker was scarcely rivaled by any gun outside of prison, was in an odd position regarding this expensive apartment. He used it as a sort of sanctuary, owing to the fact that he was very much wanted by certain members of the police department—though this did not keep him from stirring about, both night and day; and he brought back gossip to the stay-at-home Jerry. And though the lease of this extravagant apartment was in his name he moved about in it with circumspection, made no unnecessary noises, and invited none of his friends to call. In other words he did not feel that it was his. It wasn't.

Next to making trouble for the cops Billy enjoyed gossiping above the other pleasures of crookdom; though, as most fastidious dressers are, he was unwarily susceptible to the beckoning smile of a pretty woman.

"W'at's all dis scandal about dem Holders y'say? Listen. I knows all about it. Aw-ll. See?

"Listen. Dere's a howl. Oh somet'in' awful, Jerry. Y'know why? Y'know why dat geezer marries 'er? An' him wit' all dat money? I'll tell youse. He loves her, see?

"Dere was four hun'red fits. Each o' dem swells had one 'r more. Y'see, he loves her. Dat's why he marries 'er. An' all de society bugs is scan'alized.

"I'm in de know about w'at goes on 'mong dem Four Hun'reds. Bet your life. I'll say so."

Jerry grumbled sleepily, and settled himself in an attitude of pretending to listen but with his hand shading his eyes so he could doze—without the light being in his face.

Billy the Dude was at one of the happy moments of his troublous life. He lighted a cigaret with flourish of gesture, laid a silken ankle on his knee, and slouched back in his chair with the pride of recital upon him.

A wolfhound, lying on a rug under the window, attracted by the movement, looked up inquiringly and paused in a tender gaze, half sadly, before he again crouched between his paws and dozed.

"Y'see, it's jus' dis way. When Frank Holder grabs off dis dame from the —— knows where, a lady frien' o' mine is swingin' a feather duster in his sister's house.

"Y'see, she's a shop-lifter w'at's had to lay off work at her regular job till a lot o' ginks forget 'er. She's hooked up wit' a second story gun, good friend o' mine—used to work wit' 'im. O' course after the judge says, 'Mame, you'd better do all your tradin' wit' some mail-order house fr'm now on,' her man don't want 'er layin' off, doin' not'ing but eat.

"So wit' an eye on future jobs f'r himself as well as to keep her fr'm t'inking he loves 'er so much she don't have to do no work, he says:

'Mame, listen. Nix on this pairocite stuff; not by a —— sight.'

"So he makes 'er a present o' some recommendations fr'm a guy w'at does a business in furnishin' 'em to servants. Some pen pusher, b'lieve me.

"Little Mame waltzes along an' lands right. She was dere when somebody pulls de big robbery. *Somebody*, get me? I ain't sayin' who. But give me two guesses, an' I won't need de second one. Ain't nobody but *him* got de noive to pull de stunt like he done it.

"An' as I was sayin', Mame is dere when de big doin's breaks; an' maybe you t'ink her man don't pan 'er f'r muffin' her play. Gee, she could 'a' cleaned up right—jus' grabbed off ever't'ing the minute she heard there'd been a robbery, an' it'd all been put down to him. An' youse know who I mean, too."

Jerry looked about uneasily. He believed in ill luck, bad dreams, hunches, fortune-tellers, and that the Black Wolf had a sixth sense by which he knew what was said behind his back.

"Say, Jerry, an' youse oughta hear Mame tell about what goes on 'mong family an' frien's after de weddin'. Oh, boy! We was down to Dutch Louie's one night on her day off, an' she tell it all. She's full o' pep, an' 's got more sarcasm 'an a traffic cop talkin' to a flivver that's tried to do a sneak on him.

" 'Listen,' says Mame. 'Frank 's got that batch o' relatives so high in de air dey don't know whether the sky's above 'r b'low 'em. He sure knocked the socks off Sister Helena. An' dear ol' Pop Louden, he's jus' about chewed his side-w'iskers all off.

" 'Y'see this sis I runs the vacuum f'r

don't inhabit none o' them brown fronts that lines de Avenoo. That's ol'-time stuff. Them houses look like business joints too swell to have a sign out.

" 'An' Sister Helena ain't got a sou except w'at she can touch Frank for. Y'see the firs' ol' man Holder starts the habit o' leavin' it all to the kid that gets born first—pervidin' it's a boy. You men al'us gets the bes' o' ever't'ing. It ain't right. But I'm glad to list'en to them Loudens howl.

" 'An' his ot'er sister—the De Broom, she's wailin' an' gashin' her teeth too. Say, Billy, you'd t'ink Frank 'd kilt off t'ree 'r four good frien's o' de fam'ly. An' all over a little weddin'. That jus' it! He married her!

" 'An' say, Billy, that Louden bunch is scart stiff. Y'see, they're 'fraid the firs' thing she'll do is up an' have a baby. An' all us fr'm Jeff down—Jeff he's the butler—is prayin' for a boy. I'll say so! Then o' course, Frank'll leave ever't'ing to the kid, Gee—oh, but I hopes it *is* a boy!' "

Billy was a good narrator, of quick and vehement sympathy, full of feeling.

Society, as Mame knew—there is nothing that goes on in the home that is not known to the servants, and related fully to their families and friends—society was amused and pleased; not because of the romantic marriage, but because of the scandal.

"Why, my deah, bless, you," as the lantern-jawed Mrs. Delacroix expressed it, "*no*body can find out what the creature looks like. She must be dreadful. And poor old Frank, of all people! A deah boy, Frank; but a good deal of an ass. Always was. It runs in the family."

As Mame had put it, "there was weepin' an' gashin' o' teeth—believe me they was!"

According to the same spirited witness, Frank and his bride had been enticed to a massacre given by Sister Helena. Even the De Broom, as Mame called her, showed up with her skeleton—"de one Frank buys 'er for a husban'." All the family were there in war-paint. They had their knives out, and every time they caught the bride alone they started digging in.

Mame said that the young woman only smiled with eyes half-closed and remained gentle and quiet, like a lady that had four aces up her sleeve.

The creature had a gipsy-like look about her. She did not wear corsets, which confirmed the family opinion that she was immoral. Her eyebrows were not plucked or shaven; her lips did not look like raw wounds; her hair was a dark brown, bushy, bobbed, and her face was molded with delicacy and almost perfection of feature. She couldn't speak English in a civilized way. She wouldn't give a picture to the papers.

De Broom eyed her with burning, appraising eyes, and coughed, coughed, coughed. He knew her as the Cabronette, but it wasn't his way to tell all he knew or to make a scene.

The flapper friends of the family said that she was ashamed of her looks and that they didn't blame her for not having a picture for the papers. The older dames tried to get Frank to make her go to a photographer. They said that she was so lovely each of them wanted a picture; but according to Mame:

"Frank he don't fall for 'em. He don't even stump his toe. He says she's got a leary feelin' about cameras an' things an' don't like the idea. 'The same as me,' he tells 'em. 'I don't like 'em either, so I knows how Aliza feels.'

"Oh, boy, an' you oughta hear 'em pan 'er f'r that name. 'Aliza!' Huh. Sounds like a nigger name. Bet she is part coon. She looks it. Ow-er-r-r-ruR-Rr!' That's the way they talked, them dames."

Aliza was subjected to all manner of quizzing about herself, her family, her history. They were inquisitors putting on the thumb-screws, and she was a little nervous too.

What she told about herself had to undergo a cross-examination. They tore her story to pieces, they got her a little flustered; then the sisters, full of repressed triumph, as people are when they bear bad news, marched off to corner Frank.

They caught him behind one of his big black cigars alone in an alcove. They had found out something that he ought to know.

Their manner was a good deal like that of an undertaker at the bedside of his mother-in-law; and with sharp, encouraging glances from each to the other, and a sniffle here and there to show how badly they felt, they began by saying that of course they had intended to take her into the family and love her like a sister. They would have taught her manners and otherwise overcome her low breeding. She had no taste—look where he had found her—but they knew how to use polish.

But now they realized that Frank's innocence had been imposed upon by an unscrupulous creature. It was easy for an adventuress, a clever, unscrupulous creature like that to impose on a dear unsuspecting man like Frank, but his alert and watchful sisters had seen through her. And now about her history—the story she told of herself didn't fit together at all. Just listen——

Frank was big, massive, slow of movement and speech. He showed some symptoms of irritation, but they were blind. Helena, puffed out above and below her waist-line, perspired and blurted. Jessica, more fortunate of form, edged her words with bitterness and imitated the poise of her mother-in-law. With vague gestures and half-finished words he tried to silence them.

But their indignation arose and fell on him as wrath. They threw caution away. Think of the family name, they said. He grunted unhappily, and stared from one to the other.

They repeated her story, showed him the flaws in it, telling what she said, what they said, demanding now that *he* say something.

He got up heavily, and stood awkward and dull, towering above them. In a blind sort of way he pushed his hands out as if to sweep them aside.

"I know—it's all right. Go look at your—unh—your husbands—er—before you talk. My wife is all right. She is my wife. Ur-n. That story—I know—er—it's all right. It's a lie about her family and all. I know—I—un—I made it up for her—eh-er. It's all right. I knew how'd you'd ask questions—always do. I told her what to say—ur—un—I know I'm a poor liar. Ur— I——"

He shouldered his way past them.

The Loudens particularly went around in a daze of self-pity. The De Brooms were hopeful. De Broom smiled like a corpse.

"Leave it to me," he said in the midst of his coughing. "She hasn't a chance to keep him."

An inkling of the state of things got out and was whispered in the columns of a weekly that dealt in scandal. The weekly intimated that a Certain Family had put detectives to work on the biography of a Certain Bride that a Certain Wealthy Oil Bachelor had picked up in a restaurant where somebody had carelessly left her. A-hem!

Said Mame: "That tribe's layin' to frame her. T'ink they're goin' stan' aroun' suckin' deir thum's an' let a frail name 'Liza cop off deir milluns? Not 'f arsenic an' dynamite'll put a crimp in her. I'm tellin' youse. I know that bunch. Frank's all right. He's the goods. But the rest o' them animals—dey are bums!"

"So," concluded Billy the Dude as he tossed a cigaret butt toward the fireplace, "y'see I'm wise to de inner works o' dis social game. An' it's rotten, Jerry. Huh?"

Jerry, having sheltered his eyes with his fingers to avoid the light, lay back in an attitude of reposeful listening. He answered with a snore.

"Dat's de way wit' some people," said Billy the Dude musingly as he also settled down comfortably, throwing a polished foot across the arm of the chair. "I tries to learn him somet'in' an' he puts out de light on me."

He grinned with a new idea.

"Jus' watch dat bird," he remarked aloud as if to a bystander. Then with the excitement of seeming fear in his voice, he called out whisperingly—

"Hey, Jerry—Jerry—quick!"

The nerves of the lawless are jumpy. Jerry came out of his doze startled, and sat up ready to believe any alarming thing.

"Shh-hh," said Billy the Dude, mysterious, a finger to lips and ears cocked.

Jerry Peete had a flat sort of face, with owlish features; he was middle-aged, wore his hair bristling up in a way that made it appear permanently on end from some ghostly scare. Now he stared apprehensively over his shoulder, and, reaching out toward Billy, answered:

"Yes. I hear it. Shh— Who can it be?"

The answer was so convincing that Billy the Dude felt a hot, nervous flush, for he too lived up on his toes, ever alert for alarms and dangers.

"Lord," said Billy, wondering if there *was* something or if he had succeeded in scaring himself.

Jerry rose stealthily from the chair and stood still. Billy did not know whether to laugh and say it was a joke or to wait and find out if it were a joke. He waited.

Then he heard, or thought that he did, a faint sound; and Jerry touched his arm and pointed toward the wolfhound. The dog was braced, with muzzle lowered. The

hair on his neck bristled. Trained neither to growl nor bark, he stood listening and savage.

"A pinch," said Billy inaudibly, and on tiptoes he began edging toward a table drawer; but Jerry took hold of his arm and gestured arrestingly.

They plainly heard the door from the hallway click as it closed softly.

With lip-movement and gestures Jerry was saying to the dog—

"Down—down—down, you devil; down!"

They heard light footfalls in the next room. Billy pulled himself inch by inch to the table and took a big automatic from the drawer, thrusting it under the flap of his coat.

The door opened slowly. Billy stood sidewise, the gun leveled behind the flap of the coat which he would have thrown back as he shot; but he felt himself grow weak, and the point of the gun drooped. Jerry drew up a sigh that filled the room and shifted his feet uneasily. Even the dog seemed a little disconcerted, and the menace went out of its attitude as he stood watchful, curious, interested.

THE woman looked about with studied unconcern, even insolence. She was sure of herself, unanswerable to anybody, and carried herself like a savage princess entering her own rooms instead of a strange apartment. It was evident that she had not expected to find any one, but it was also evident that she did not greatly care.

She was alive from the sharp little toes of her brightly buckled slippers to fur turban on which a carbuncle blazed. The dark eyes flashed imperiously.

Billy's first thought was that the door had been unlocked and she had made a mistake, entering the wrong apartment; but he saw that she knew where she was. His wonder was astonishment.

Jerry Peete breathed heavily.

The woman scrutinized them sharply, but with an air of indifference. She was as straight as a young pine-tree, and disdain for ordinary mortals such as these two fairly shimmered from her.

Billy, ever alertly observant of beauty, realized that she was about the prettiest thing under heaven and that she seemed to know it. Her features were almost artificially perfect, like a cameo's, and it was easy to understand why she treated every man as a slave.

The early Autumn midnight had a slight chill. Her sable sack, fashioned—to emphasize the squareness of her shoulders—with a semi-military collar, held her chin up with a suggestion of aloof pride, of challenging *hauteur*.

But Billy the Dude did not suffer stage-fright if beauty's shock had been a little severe—even on his impudence; but he eased the gun around to his hip pocket and said heartily:

"Come right in an' make youseself t' home. We don't get your message 'r we'd been to de train. It's a pleasure—I'll tell the worl'! An' anyt'ing youse say, goes. Jus' spill it."

It was beneath her to answer such impertinence. She turned her face toward Jerry and said—

"When Black Wolf comes do not tell him I am here."

Jerry repressed a groan as he bowed humbly. He believed that all women and some cats, black ones, brought bad luck; but Jerry was not easily rattled. As he straightened up with a most butleresque air he said soberly as the owl he somewhat resembled—

"The name I shall not give him is?"

"Mine," she answered at once with an upward tilt of her chin.

Jerry bowed humbly, imperturbably, asking—

"You are?"

"Leela Cabron."

She said it proudly, self-consciously, sure of herself, as one who knows her own importance.

Billy the Dude straightened up with renewed interest. His quick fingers automatically touched his hair, patted down his tie, hitched up his trousers; and, dropping a hand in each side-pocket, he swaggered a bit as he regarded the noted character—renowned for her beauty and for her temper.

"Yes, Miss Cabron."

Jerry was bowing again.

"Will you be seated. I can not say what time he will return."

She ignored him. She ignored Billy. She went straight to the wolfhound, kneeled with a certain impetuous, heedless air, and took the dog's long head between her gloved hands.

The men exchanged glances, and Jerry made a gesture of dispair.

"His name?" she demanded without looking around—just addressed the question to the air and expected an answer.

Billy the Dude answered perkily:

"Son o' the Devil—Son f'r short, or maybe Devil. 'Cordin' as how youse feel."

"Ah, my *brother*," she said, snuggling her cheek against the hairy head, and babbling half-whispered nonsense to the animal.

At the door Jerry whispered to Billy the Dude:

"No good's coming from this. Mark what I tell you. I've got a feeling——"

And Billy the Dude was not listening. He interrupted to say:

"I'd give a couple o' legs to be dat dog—right now. OOoo-boy!"

Jerry groaned and vanished.

When she stood up the dog raised its eyes admiringly; and when with her distinctive air of assurance she went to a big chair before the low-burning fireplace the dog followed and dropped at her feet.

Billy hastened to take a chunk of wood from the brass-embossed woodbox and throw it onto the coals, which he stirred up briskly. She watched his motions, rather than him, through eyes narrowed sleepily; then, removing her sacque, tossed it carelessly over the back of the chair, poked a caressing toe under the Son of the Devil's jaw, and, glancing at Billy as if he wore a bellboy's uniform, said—

"Will you hand me something to read—please?"

She accompanied the "please" with a glance, brief as an accent, that thrilled him clear to the botton of his toes. She was a woman, all silk and fire, as aware of her charm as a snake of its fangs.

"Sure. W'at'd youse like?" Billy asked in eagerness.

"Anything. I do not like to read anything. Print is tiresome."

"Youse said it! Books give me a pain. But him—say, he sleeps wit' 'em!"

Smilingly she was poking the tip of a small foot into the long, cavelike mouth of the dog, but she shot a quick glance out of the corners of her eyes at the reference to "him."

"Where is he now, do you know?"

She asked it enticingly, her voice soft as the purr of a sleepy Persian, yet tantalizing him with the suggestion that perhaps he, Billy, was of insufficient importance to be informed.

It happened that Billy did know. The impulse was to tell what he knew; but after all in some ways he was a wise *hombre*, which is vastly different from being a wise guy; so he answered:

"He don't say where he's goin'. He jus' takes de big gray bus an' goes."

"By himself?"

"Sure," Billy lied.

She sat up, erect as a queen on a throne, faced Blly with abrupt directness and threw the question—

"Do you know the word's been passed to kill him?"

"Him!"

"Yes, him."

Billy the Dude lost about three inches in height as he almost imperceptibly settled down on himself in a kind of crouch. His smiling, smooth face was slightly distorted with a sneer; and, throwing out a hand palm down, almost level with his knee, he said:

" 'Fore anybody croaks him, dere's some ot'er guys dey wants to get first, an' I'm one of 'em. See?"

She was unimpressed. Scowls, hard expressions, threats, menace, were as familiar as toilet ointments. She was very young, but knew that all men were liars and most of them boasted.

"Where," she asked with complete detachment, "is that magazine you were getting for me? One with pictures. Thank you."

She dropped it on to her lap, crossed her legs, leaned hand to cheek and idly turned the pages.

Billy, frozen out, smoked meditatively, got himself a magazine, put it away, stared at her, examined her critically, and finally went into the next room where Jerry Peete gloomily paced back and forth on the thick rug.

## VII

A BIG gray limousine swung with slow dignity around the corner of the deserted street and bore down to the entrance of the Wellington-Dane.

It was a powerful, nearly noiseless car with a motor that purred like a huge cat and cord tires thick as an elephant's leg; and it paused at the curb, the engine throbbing like a quiet heart.

A figure in a long overcoat emerged from the darkened interior and stood for a moment at the door, held open by the driver.

"When you get to the garage, Harry, look it over pretty well. I dropped something on the floor. A ring I think. I couldn't find it. If somebody at the garage spotted it—you understand?"

The inflection was a little cynical and partly amused. "Yes'r, Misser Mid'ton," said the chauffeur, who was known under the Bertillon system as Harry Devore, *alias* Silkeen Harry, *alias* Chink-Eyes.

He was lean as an alley cat and about as noiseless. A dangerous man with a gun too, and suspected of being part Chinese. There was a slant to his eyes and a lithe, slithering movement to his walk. He was known to have nerve, to hit the pipe and to use cocain.

When he worked by himself he pulled off daylight holdups in down-town entrances—and got away with it. He had genius for being quick on the move and was cunning as a lynx. Sheer impulse was all that ever guided him.

He closed the door quietly and turned to mount his seat; then hesitated and stared over his shoulder.

He had heard something. He did not know what and could not have been sure whether it was his ears or his imagination that touched the senses of hearing.

Like an animal made uneasy he waited, tense, uncertain, dangerous.

Half a block away an arc light clicked and chattered to itself. A splotch of light glowed in the apartment entrance. All else was darkness and shadow, with leafless trees ranged along the sidewalk like great candelabras, extinguished.

Silkeen Harry looked after the man, wrapped in a long coat, with both hands in his pockets. It had been a successful evening. Very. A king's ransom was in each of the pockets.

Two living shadows flashed from the darkness and became men. They had knives. Half-crouching, they leaped.

Silkeen got the situation by instinct and acted long before a thought could have reached him. He was two-thirds jungle creature anyway.

He poured an automatic's dumdums into both the shadow men and threw the gun away as he leaped to the seat. An empty gun is of no value to any one but the district attorney.

At once the heavy car plunged ahead—plunged as if jerked forward by a tow-rope, and vanished at the nearest corner.

Silkeen and the gray limousine were out of sight before a startled face peered through any of the windows that lined the street.

Middleton was not less rapid in his movements, but there was no blind impulse in his way of work. He knew what he was doing and why as he hurried along the narrow trademan's walk toward the rear of the Wellington-Dane.

He stopped, listened watchfully when deep within the shadows.

A crowd gathered, quickly, even at that hour.

The dead men were runty dark fellows of an Italian type.

". . . sure shot to pieces, ain't they? . . ."

". . . gang battle. Getting to be awful . . ."

". . . I heard 'n auto—didn't chu? . . ."

". . . must 'a' been fifty shots . . ."

". . . dagoes, ain't they? . . ."

". . . I wonder what . . ."

It was a shivering, excited crowd; men in pajamas with overcoats about them; women in robes; others more dressed. They came tumbling out of their warm beds to look at dead men on the pavement.

Middleton edged out of the shadows, joined the crowd, pressed close and looked down into the circle about the bodies.

All about people chattered wonderingly.

The police in time came and learned nothing. They were mystified then and later as to how it came that two low-browed Italian gangsters had been killed at the entrance of a place like the Wellington-Dane.

## VIII

AS THE first shot cracked the night, Billy the Dude sprang from the chair and stood alert as an aroused animal.

Report on report went bursting through the air so fast that the sound was confused.

Billy cried to Jerry Peete:

"Dat's Silkeen's gun! He's tearin' off somet'in'—it's cops sure'n ——'s a foot deep. Dey're tryin' to make a pinch. F'r ——'s sake——"

Billy yanked out the heavy gun he was carrying and with a bound went through the library door, where the woman and dog were up, motionless, tense, listening.

The shooting stopped.

"Silkeen 'll never go t' jail. Dey gotta take him t' de morgue!"

Leela looked at him questioningly.

"Silkeen Harry. Mr. Mid'ton's chauffeur—nights. Dat was his gat. Coppers been on his trail——"

Billy checked himself. There is no wisdom in talking with a stranger, no matter what her name.

"But Black Wolf—where is he?"

She asked it fiercely as if not a moment could be lost in having the answer. Her eyes flashed.

"Wit' Silkeen."

"Then they've got him!" she cried, her manner threatening as if about to avenge the man she thought dead.

Without a word more they followed Jerry, who had moved toward a room that fronted the street. No lights were turned on in this room. They raised a window and peered out furtively, though the windows on all sides were bursting into light and from them people were leaning. Voices, half-hysteric, chattered and called out vaguely to know what had happened.

Two dark blots lay on the sidewalk where the Wellington-Dane entrance light made a dim yellowish splotch.

"S'help me!" Billy whispered, jubilant, as he clutched Jerry's arm. "It's a getaway! Silkeen's croaked 'em an' made a vanish."

"Means *we* got to get away," Jerry answered unhappily. "I always said that Chink would ruin everything."

"Youse always pull the I-tol'-you-so stuff. Silkeen ain't ruint nothin' but two perfectly healthy cops—dat's my bet."

Jerry Peete shook his head mournfully. He was obsessed with the gift of prophecy, and after the manner of prophets he was not at all discouraged by his inability to be accurate.

Leela leaned from the window. She pressed against Billy. He could feel the warmth of her flesh; and a strong strange perfume, of oriental pungency, that he had noticed before now seemed for a moment almost to strangle him—but he liked it.

To her ears he said—

"If the p'lice didn't aw time butt in dey wouldn't be gettin' hurted so much."

But she did not appear to hear; and Jerry answered with a wordless grumble.

The light clicked on behind, and the three of them whirled in nervous alarm. Merwin Middleton was in the doorway, and glanced from one to another. He had a way of being noiseless, and also of making people wait a little uneasily until he spoke.

"Good evening," he said sarcastically, but rather amused.

No one answered. Leela flushed.

"Some excitement on the street. I noticed the crowd as I came by. Shooting affair, it seems."

"Cops?" Billy gasped eagerly, hopefully.

He gave the little crook a slow answer, half-smiling as he said:

"I think not. They appear to be foreigners."

"Uh," said Billy.

It was not clear whether he was relieved or disappointed.

"Foreigners are ruining the country," Jerry grumbled.

He did not say it to be heard, but to express himself.

Middleton looked at Leela coolly, without welcome. His manner was ironical, though one could scarcely put a finger on the place where politeness faded and insult began.

"And how can I deserve the honor, Miss Cabron—at such an inconveniencing hour, too?"

Leela pointed through the open window.

"I knew it was coming."

"Oh, really. A gang battle right on our doorstep. I have heard that gangsters sometimes give notice of shooting scrapes in advance—so the police will keep away, isn't it?"

He was wilfully misinterpreting, and she knew it. Her nature was flamingly petulant. She had been spoiled in about every way that a woman can be spoiled—and the devil has as many traps for their souls as there are sands on the shore—but she held back her temper, though with clenched teeth and tightened jaw. Her eyes gleamed, and Middleton, without seeming to evade her, looked away.

"Wasn't dey after youse?" Billy asked, mystified.

"After me?"

This with just a hint of surprize.

"Why on earth, Billy, would anybody be after me?"

He handed his hat to Jerry; and while getting out of the overcoat said:

"Just lay the coat in the library, Jerry. Thank you."

The telephone rang.

It was Silkeen calling up to get the lay of the land and ask for a tip as to whether to duck or play that it never happened.

Middleton answered:

"Come right up, Harry. And bring around the car, the small one. Roadster, yes. I have a friend here. To take home, yes."

The dog snuggled its head against Middleton's hand, coaxing for attention; and after getting an absent-minded pat went wistfully to Leela, sure that she would caress him.

CHANCE once had brought Leela face to face with Black Wolf in a café. Ever since the night when she unmasked him her eyes had been roving wherever men gathered, hoping to find him; though in the meantime she had found out more about him than he cared to have anybody know.

On sight Leela impetuously discarded what arts of maidenly modesty she knew about. The haughty, fiery, cruel girl deliberately and desperately tried to fascinate him; and Middleton, suspicious of her kinship with Delilah, froze up and would not be moved.

He knew that the woman who would ruin a man first makes him love her; and he was not sure but that she planned with patience and depth of cruelty some sort of complete humiliation for him. It was not like her to love so flagrantly unless she could later laugh at the fool for having believed that she, Leela Cabron, had lost her head.

Leela put in most of her nights and some of her days hating this Black Wolf because she loved him.

For months, since that faraway dramatic night, she had been obsessed. No other man had ever treated her with a tinge of the indifference that was so deliberate in him.

Part of the time she wanted to kill him. Part of the time she wondered what could make him love her. All of the time she was fearful that his eyes were longingly turned elsewhere.

Leela was fierce, cruel, dangerous, a petted, pampered, hectic girl; filled with wind-blown impulses, reckless, unquestioning, jealous. She had been born into gaudy luxuries, and had no education and no morals—nothing but a woman's heart, as elemental in its daring and passion as a barbarian princess'. She could and would dance like a drunken bacchante. Before entering her twenties she knew so much of the world that she thought all of it was bad, and that the worst of all was what pretended to be good.

But something about being humbled by this Black Wolf gave her pleasure.

She might be, and was, amazed and angered that he ignored her; but, except at the continually recurring moments when suspicious that his heart was interested elsewhere, it also gave her a strange, endearing satisfaction. At times it thrilled her to imagine that he had struck her with his fist, though she knew very well she would kill any man who did.

She loved him. She wanted him. No price was too great to pay. And she meant to have him, even if she must come wooing on her hands and knees. There was almost a flagellante's pleasure in the pain of supplication; and it meant nothing to her that she knew very well, and had proved it a hundred times, that disdain was what brought men to a girl's feet.

As long as she was convinced that he loved no woman, though she was tremblingly suspicious, Leela humbled herself in a sort of ecstatic devotion; she got a curious satisfaction out of it, partly because she felt he must be a man among men to resist her. But at the first thought of a rival she was tigerish. Her pride would let a man treat her with indifference, but was inflamed at the idea of a woman triumphing over her.

Always, or nearly so, in a love-murder the man is killed not as punishment for being faithless, but to spoil the other woman's trophy.

She saw that he was reluctant to be alone with her; and this was not displeasing, for it suggested that he might be a little afraid to trust himself.

They went into the library, and when Billy would have got out of the way Middleton had him sit down and stirred him up to talk.

Leela was patient; the more so for being a little amused at so plainly seeing the artifice by which Middleton seemed to evade being alone with her. Besides, what she had to tell him was more important than he imagined and would come as something of a revenge for his attitude. She wanted to see him apologetic. So, as night hours meant nothing to her, she pretended an interest in Billy the Dude's talk,

and though she sat stiffly as if on a throne she smiled encouragingly, and all the while scarcely heard a word of what he said.

The wolfhound dropped at her feet, and this gave her pride; for she caught the faint expression on Middleton's face—just a glimmer of surprize that his own dog should crouch adoringly before a stranger. By the dim lines of amusement that then appeared she knew he was cynically thinking that even dogs fell under her charm. Billy took her pleased smile unto himself and grew more animated.

WHEN Silkeen Harry came Middleton met him in an adjoining room and talked with him there.

Silkeen came forward respectfully, moving with a lithe slouch, alertly furtive. He was thin of body and face. His cap was in his fingers. His chest looked bigger than it was because of the padded leather coat. He wore leather puttees, and his shoes had rubber soles. There was nothing of bravado in his appearance. He looked sickly and at that moment apologetic.

Before he spoke he glanced watchfully behind him, from force of a cautious habit. Putting out a claw-like hand, he showed a platinum ring, glittering with stones, and said:

"Dis was dere. Some un o' dem *gar*-ige guys might've found it. An dey're all t'ieves. It's wort' a couple hun'red bones."

Like all crooks, he estimated value by, not the jeweler's price, but the fence's.

Middleton gave it an appraising glance and put it aside.

Silkeen went on, nervously humble:

"Hope youse don't t'ink I was off my nut, Misser Mid'ton. I lamps them chives an' I tears loose. I hear on my way up dey was bot' dagoes. Dey sure out to make a bum-lookin' corpse o' youse."

"But they must have mistaken me for some one. Don't you think that possible, Harry?"

"Dagoes is humans. Like de rest of us, dey sometimes croaks de wrong guy."

Middleton scrutinized the thin, sharp face, lighted up by deep, black eyes unnaturally glowing. The eyes had the tilt of a yellow man's, and were nervous, almost abashed, restless; the sort of eyes that any student of human nature would say were not to be trusted. Students of human nature, preachers, judges, professors, almost everybody, talk as if there were no kinship between the evil and the virtuous, and have not yet learned that the cleverest rascals have steady eyes and a handclasp warm and firm as a brother's welcome.

"They made a mistake, Harry. It would be stupid to try to thank you."

"Youse welcome. B'lieve me, youse welcome t' anyt'ing I got, Misser Mid'ton."

"That was the fastest gunwork I ever saw even you do, Harry. Incredibly fast. And accurate. It was all over before I got myself turned around. You must have thought——"

"——, Misser Mid'ton, I don't t'ink. I jus' shut me eyes an' shoots," he said with uneasy modesty, shifting his feet, shifting his shoulders, looking down at his cap.

Middleton watched him, then nodded slightly, saying with irony too subtle for Silkeen:

"That's the way most people shoot. Not every one has your luck."

"Youse said it!"

"Those poor devils made a mistake—a bad one. But just supposing, Harry, they were after me; say somebody was out to put me away—Cabron for instance."

"Dat 'd be awful," said Silkeen Harry moving his feet; and from an angle his black eyes watched Middleton.

"He was really as bad as they say, Harry? This Cabron."

"Worser."

"They sent him up, didn't they? This Cabron?"

Middleton asked it casually, idly.

"Yeah. But dey oughta give dat guy a million years. He was wicious, dat guy."

"You had a run-in with him once, didn't you?"

Middleton might have been inquiring about something that had happened in a play, dimly remembered.

"I t'rowed a rod on 'im. But I wasn't lucky dat time."

"What was the argument, Harry?"

"Dere wasn't no arg'ment, Misser Mid'ton. None a-tall. I done a little job f'r him. He promised all kinds o' protection, 'n' wouldn't come t'rough. He give me the double cross an' I had 'o duck an' lay low. When I comes up f'r air I takes a shot at him. I said I'd get dat guy, an' he'd better crawl in a coffin an' let somebody bury him if he don't want some lead pills in his guts. I'm tellin' youse."

He had begun a little uncertainly, but grew intense and finished with a snarl.

"But didn't he get a pretty stiff sentence? He has a long time ahead in prison."

"Buey!" said Silkeen with almost obscene contempt. "Fr'm one to twenty years. He's done two mont's. He'll be out in two more. How 'n —— dey ever cinched him I don't know. But he knows too much t' stay in stir. He took it wit'out a fight. Dat means he's comin' out. 'N stan' fr'm under."

Middleton reached across to the table and idly fingered the ring, saying—

"For such a dangerous personage, he seems to have let you alone."

"Yeah. He's let me 'lone f'r de same reason de cops has. I ain't put no notices in de papers askin' 'em to call."

Middleton appeared wholly unenlightened but not greatly interested, just mildly so.

"I don't understand yet why a person of Cabron's influence—with plenty of money, too, hasn't he?—would let himself be railroaded to the penitentiary. How do you guess at that, Harry?"

Harry leaned brokenly against a corner of the table. He sagged at every joint of his thin body, and with an air curiously humble in one so notoriously dangerous said:

"I'll say somebody was after him dat would 'a' busted dis ol' town wide open if he'd showed fight. Cabron had 'o take it layin' down to safe all his frien's. An' he 's got some frien's, Misser Mid'ton, dat would 'a' croaked *him* to keep 'emselves fr'm gettin' showed up.

"The big t'ing in dis ol' burg is, 'keep it dark.' Dat's de slogan Tammany likes bes'. An' Cabron, he took his jolt f'r de good o' his own health."

"And you think he would be really dangerous if he turned lose some of his Italian gangsters on—say—me?"

Silkeen Harry slouched a step closer and dropped a hand with palm outspread, saying:

"Dang'rous? Lis'en. I don't t'row de bull, see? An' I'm tellin' youse straight. I don't want no dago's game. I'm a white man, an' dem dagoes uses steel, an' me—I hates de sight of a chive. If youse don't watch 'em dey'll stick it in you a foot deep while you's poundin' your ear. Youse wake up on a marble slab down to de dead-house. I'm tellin' youse."

"I see. I see. Thank you, Harry."

"In dis game," he added a little pathetically, "somebody's al'us watchin' t' bump youse off."

Middleton tossed a match toward a tray and looked at the tip of his cigaret.

"Very expressive, that word. *Bump* you off. You just shove the unlucky devil right out into the bottomless darkness that's before all of our feet."

"E-yes'r," Silkeen answered fumblingly.

Middleton watched the curling smoke for a moment, then quietly, his eyes on Silkeen:

"It's a game as you say. A bad game. No matter how you play it—some day, a stumble—and the bump—for each of us. The bottomless darkness, just as we walked along a cliff. Oh well, I hope those poor devils that had the sidewalk for a death-bed don't greatly mind."

Silkeen Harry was attentively puzzled, and did not answer. His dark eyes furtively watched. He was not quite sure whether he ought to say something; but Middleton sat silent, unexpectantly looking at nothing.

## IX

WHEN Middleton returned to the library Leela was alone, before the fire, composedly leafing a magazine. The dog lay humbly at her small feet, head between his paws, and looked up sadly.

"Well, old son," said Middleton languidly, snapping his fingers at the dog, which lifted its head, moved its tail, but did not get up. "Where is Billy?" he asked of her, but turning away casually toward a newspaper that lay on the table.

Leela flipped the magazine, shutting it up, looked at him keenly from under lowered lashes; then, affecting a yawn, replied with a bored air—

"I told him to get out."

Middleton looked over his shoulder at her, his eyebrows slightly lifted, coolly surprized.

"Yes," she added, deftly opening a cigaret-case and removing a cigaret with one hand. "And I told him—" pause while she lighted the cigaret— "to stay out—" pause while she puffed and inhaled deeply— "no matter how loudly you shouted—" puff—"shouted for help."

Middleton turned a page or two of the newspaper, idly scanning the head lines; then as if something of what she had said

finally got to his attention he looked around with:

"What was the matter, did you say? He was to come if you shouted for help?"

Leela was exasperated, but also amused. She stood up, moving quickly. There was something tempestuous about even her way of rising from a chair or walking across a room. Her movements suggested swiftness without being jerky or even impetuous; but she was full of fire, challenging; her eyes were rapid, and there was an impact when she looked at one.

She came up, erect, shoulders back, and stood close to him, watching him with unabashed directness and smiled a little playfully but with anger.

"Listen," she said jestingly, with a sharp edge of mockery. "Youse jus' listen—as I did. Us dagoes uses steel——"

Her hand flashed at her waist and a glimmering stiletto was poised before her breast, point at him; but Middleton did not move an eyelid. His manner was coldly curious. His hands had slipped into his coat pockets; and, partly turned toward her, he waited.

She put the steel away, and with a half-threatening laugh asked:

"Why not inquire of Cabron's daughter why he went to the pen? She could tell you. Oh, I hate you—I hate you, Black Wolf! *You* sent my father up."

She was suddenly aflame with anger; and, chin lifted, she glared while the hand which had dropped the stiletto into its hidden sheath came up as if to drive a steel edge home. Then with bitterness:

"And I came to warn you. This is how you receive me."

Her attitude was mockingly supercilious.

"You didn't want to be alone with me. Was it because your conscience troubled you? No. No, not that. Conscience! Bah. Perhaps you thought——"

She glared as if on the instant she would be an avenger.

"Black Wolf—Black Devil, you are."

"Well?"

He asked it ambiguously. It might have meant anything.

She stepped back, hands to hips, asking accusingly:

"Do you want to know why Cabron went to prison? Do you? It was because a fellow who calls himself Black Wolf *sold* some records that he took from Cabron's vault."

Middleton shook his head slightly, indifferently. He was attentive, but seemed hardly at all interested.

"You mean Holder stole them from you?" she demanded.

"Who?"

"Holder. Frank Holder. The man—" she grew dramatic—"who gave the district attorney a half-million, and, pointing to my father, said, 'Get him!' "

"Who," asked Middleton with every appearance of ignorance, "is Frank Holder?"

Leela answered with contempt—

"My cousin's husband."

"Oh, I see. A sort of family quarrel. This Holder—he must have money. A half-million. Your cousin did well."

Leela did not know whether he was as unconcerned and as unenlightened as he seemed. His manner suggested precisely what his words said; but she had deep and bitter reasons for believing that he was throwing her off, or trying to.

"I suppose," she said tauntingly, "that you remember her—the cousin?"

"I suppose," he answered—as if it were an answer. "But before that, before this Holder affair, didn't she marry or something?"

"Huh. It was the *something*. Yes."

Then with animation—

"But some of us dagoes used a chive on him—on that something you referred to; and that's what's going to happen to——"

She caught herself up abruptly.

Middleton smiled understandingly, but was scarcely amused, as he finished the sentence for her—

"—what's going to happen to this Holder person if he doesn't look out."

"Since when do us *dagoes*—" Leela stressed the word bitterly—"*dagoes* forgive an injury!"

"Injury?"

"Bah. When you go *back* to the pen will you consider it an injury?"

He looked at her penetratingly. She had struck and struck hard, expecting that he would be startled. She had even hoped that she might drive him to his knees—though, as this is the paradox of woman, if she humbled him she would break her love of him; and she did not want it broken.

But at least, she felt, he might feel some gratitude toward her that she knew his secrets and protected them when every normal instinct of vengeance should have drawn her to her father's wishes.

"I see. You think every crook has done time. There *are* exceptions, Miss Cabron."

She laughed, pleased, tolerantly triumphant.

"Oh I am not guessing, *Mister* Middleton. Usually you are very careful about your finger-prints and all. *Usually* go gloved—to work. But there are ways of finding out things, particularly when one has as many friends at Headquarters as I have—and sample finger-prints. Oh, much more easily found than a key to an apartment. I, you see, got both."

Leela dangled a key before his face, and when he reached up to examine it she jerked it away.

"I had too much trouble getting this one," she said.

"No need for trouble about that. I've often bribed superintendents of apartment-houses—or their maids."

Leela threw back her head and regarded him with the air of one who had both hands full of trumps.

She asked: "Would it interest you—a story I heard from a friend of mine? It is about a certain man, a white man—not a *dago*—and a half-breed Chinaman, who, together shot their way out of a penitentiary not so very far from here——"

Middleton watched her with no appearance of interest; but she was not at all deceived by his composure. She knew that he knew there was no possibility of getting her belief to let go of the facts; and she began to realize that his poise and self-control were greater than she had admiringly thought.

"Odd, isn't it, *Mister* Middleton, that this fellow who broke out of stir with the monk should be the same person who robbed our house?"

She continued to regard him with smiling triumph. But he showed no anxiety, not even curiosity; until at last, almost exasperated, she demanded—

"Why don't you ask how I know?"

"Do you?" he said indifferently.

"Yes. My friends in the identification bureau—I took a little red goblet that sat on the mantel to my friends. Oh, they were greatly interested. They told me all about this wonderful crook who broke prison, and they are *so* anxious to meet him. Did you ever hear of such an individual, *Mister* Middleton?"

As composedly as if denying it he nodded and said with sardonic quietness:

"You win, Miss Cabron. May I congratulate you on your—ah—affiliations with the detective bureau?"

Leela's face went red as if sunburned. The insult was impaling, and she had brought it upon herself.

He added: "Of course, in telling your friends how you came by the finger-prints you mentioned Black Wolf. There is, I believe, a reward of some kind. Two or three rewards. But of course you are familiar with that. However, I suppose that like many of those who serve in the police department, you have a price. Name it."

She was rigid, staring with enigmatic severity.

"Yes—" slowly, significantly, inescapably—"I have a price."

Middleton spoke up quickly, making a slight gesture, palms upward:

"I know—by the way you say it, I know it isn't money. Money is all I have. Not a great deal of that. But some—some."

"I am not a blackmailer," said Leela almost imploringly. "Don't you know I would tear my tongue out before I would tell the police where to find you? Don't you know I swore that I did not see your face? Oh, I came here tonight to warn you of Cabron himself!"

Then beseechingly, with the complete self-crushed humbleness of a proud woman, she caught at his shoulder, holding him, gripping him, drawing him toward her, and she whispered fiercely:

"I love you. I love you, Black Wolf. Never have I told that to any man but you—not though I have lied to a thousand. But this is truth, Black Wolf: I love you!"

Her eyes almost closed. They were aglow with yielding, melting passion, and the whisper became soft, seductive, as she pulled at him and formed her lips to meet the kiss she begged: "*Kiss* me! *Kiss* me! I love you—oh, how I love you!"

IN THE casual misuse of language the word *love* covers every form of affection from a friendly marriage to fierce eroticism; but the sort of emotion that poets and criminologists have in mind when thay say "love" is a heedless, unquestioning passion that is, or closely resembles, madness in that it has no discrimination, no modesty, no sense. It may endure a lifetime, or it may vanish as other

madnesses do; but while it lasts it is unresisting and irresistible.

This Middleton, Black Wolf, or whichever of a half-dozen *alias*-es he might be called, had set fire to her.

He was no fine romantic figure, though poised and with a touch of weariness in his quietly watchful manner; but he was different from any man she had known, or seemed so to her.

The underworld did not know him as a crook; that is, there were few to recognize him outside of his mask as Black Wolf. He was known casually by sight in an unidentified sort of way, as hundreds of men from the world above, the respectable upper crust of people, are known; for the Tenderloin of every city that ever existed has been the playground of rich men's sons.

It is extremely rare for a crook not to be known as a crook on sight by both the underworld and the police; and even when the police want him on some unfixable charge there are usually at least twoscore people who know where he is, so that he is at the mercy of the first stool-pigeon that dares whisper. But though the man in hiding is the bitterest enemy to each of the twoscore, and every one of them wants his heart on a knife-point, yet if they are true sons of the shadows never a word of their enemy's hiding-place will reach the ears of the cop.

Every crook worthy of the name knows that the lowest thing in the deepest spot of hell is the snitch. Every snitch signs his own death writ with his tongue. He is outcast and pariah, even among the damned. Yet, such is the lust of revenge, the weakness of fear, the eagerness of man to play Judas, that the cops always have a flock of pigeons about their ears.

This Black Wolf had made a name for himself as a gem thief; and he robbed the rich because the rich had the most to lose. He took gems because he had a market for gems.

"Anybody who wears a diamond can afford to lose it," was the cynical remark of the jeweler to whom Middleton carried his loot.

Middleton knew that the man with a little money and the big pull has few worries in the crime game; so he had cast an appraising eye on Cabron, the restaurant man, a fellow that furnished light and music for the upper class of the lower world, a meddler in politics, a rapacious and cunning rascal with the face of a hawk and the manner of a Japanese diplomat.

He had got on so well for so many years with the Powers-That-Be-after-the-Graft that he never thought a crook would raid him. It is unprofessional and blastingly risky to frisk a friend of Tammany's. All Cabron was afraid of was that one of the higher-ups sometime in a reform jam might try to throw him to the dogs; so he had taken the precaution of keeping for many years such notations, letters, notes, records and evidence as would make the familiar Powers-That-Be afraid to grow unfriendly. But in doing so he had forged a two-edged weapon. It cut both ways. And Black Wolf stole it.

Also, that same night, he had stolen from Leela her heart.

And whatever he knew of women, he did not know what to make of the complete and utter honesty of impulse in her.

Life is a tragic thing among the high and low, the sad, gay, and all the others of the world; for those women who are generous, are quickly used up, broken, thrown aside; while the pretty, clawed and fanged little selfish beasts, have an ache that is never appeased no matter what they get. Always, even when treacherous, these women wish for their own defeat. In the sum of unhappiness they greatly suffer. A woman can not be happy without the sense of having been overpowered; and part of every vampirish woman's contempt for men is that she has not been humbled.

This may be a racial memory of cavemen wooings; or cave men, as more direct and simple creatures, may have wooed that way because the antediluvian maidens wished it.

Women still wish it. They never love unless they can feel a sense of sacrifice or adoration; both emotions of humbleness. But so many things beside passion enter into modern love, the consideration of money and caste, the fear of the last chance and the half-drunken recklessness of "what's the use anyway," together with the fine art of simulation, with all girls making themselves up like harlot decoys, that a cautious fellow can scarcely ever know when he is loved; and not one woman in ten dozen knows whether or not she really does love. Besides, the intelligent woman learns quickly what vamps know by instinct—if she

doesn't play a cunning game with the men, some man will make a fool of her.

Leela had feverishly lived; she had flirted with and broken men, humbled the dashing, gallant Karmondy, to whom few women ever wished to deny anything; she had gone through parties De Broom planned, and been wearied, petulantly angered at the sheer lack of novelty in his imagination; she knew something of all forms of evilness and discontentedly thought all men were alike except that some had better table manners than others.

De Broom, suppressing his coughs that he might have more breath to plead that she was cruel, had pleased her only in so far as he had seemed to suffer. All women love flattery, but only the very young and the pitifully faded take it seriously. To the wise girls it is as pleasant music, finished when the sound stops; remembered, if at all, for the tune and not the player. And Leela had been wise until like Psyche in the fable she had lifted the mask.

She stood with lips turned to Middleton and eyes half-closed, her small hands clenched on his shoulders. She was as humble for one moment as a beggar with an empty cup.

Middleton slowly reached up and took a hand in his, holding it; but the moment of humbleness was gone. He had refused her. She jerked away, tense and angry.

"I hate you!"

The intake of breath when she had said it was like a hiss.

"Leela."

He spoke quietly, but there was no chill in the voice. She looked away, as if ashamed. Perhaps she was.

"Leela, don't you see that the man who loved you even madly could not wisely treat you otherwise?"

"Madly!"

She flung it as a taunt, as if one spoke of a heart-throb in a jumping-jack. Then, curious, demandingly:

"Why? Why would he have to be a stick—like you?"

"A stick? Leela, the first time he let go of himself the least little bit you would put him in the fire."

"Oh, I'd like to put you some place!"

He reached out and took unresistingly a hand that hung at her side. His gesture was not caressing—consoling rather. She avoided his face but looked down at the hand he held as if watchful to see what he was about to do with it.

"You have put me some place. In a very difficult place. In fact I scarcely know what to do."

She looked up at him with steady, suspicious eyes, waiting.

"You came to warn me that an attempt would be made to get me, didn't you?"

No answer.

"But it would be inappropriate, ungracious, almost insulting, for me to say merely that I am grateful."

"You're not. So why say it?"

He smiled a little, answering:

"I don't intend to. There is nothing else that I—I can wisely say."

Leela pulled the hand away and a foot restlessly tapped the floor as she waited for what to say; then bitterly:

"But I thought you would at least tell me, 'Thank you!' "

"No; if some one said merely, 'Thank you' after what you have done and said, you should—you would at least have the moral right to shoot him."

The restless foot went on tapping. She did not change expression, but quietly, calmly—

"If my father knew he would kill me."

"I will do anything to keep him from knowing, or after he does know——"

"He ought to kill me. He is my father. Any of his friends would."

Middleton had the unworthy suspicion that perhaps she was reviewing her danger to touch his sympathy.

"He will not be there long. In prison," she added. "You put him there. You."

Her tone grew hard.

"Why did you sell those things to that Holder?"

"I sold nothing to Holder."

"You lie!"

It was a statement, not an accusation. She was only telling him that she knew he did, not reproving him for it.

"If you say that, there is nothing more that I can say."

"Then how did he get them? Tell me that, will you? Or—"and suspicions flamed up like a powder-flash—"did you *give* them to Javotte?"

"No, I did not give them to Javotte."

"You liked *her*."

Middleton came near to saying, "She resembled you," but it would have been too much like gallantry. He asked:

"How did she happen to attract this Holder? You say he is very rich."

"Oh," she answered carelessly as if thinking of something else, but getting this information out of the way, "he was slumming or something and found her nursing a lot of sick dago babies. They weren't hers, so he thought she must have a good heart. She was always crying over something—other people's troubles. But you tell me—"earnestly—"how did Holder get my father's papers?"

"He didn't get them."

She looked outraged by such a stupid attempt to deceive her.

"He did."

"No. Just copies of certain——"

"Oh! *Now* I know!"

Something had struck her that seemed to illuminate all that had been puzzling. She drew away from him, anger glittering in her eyes.

"You didn't sell them—you *gave* them. I have been a fool. You might have got any price you wanted, and you gave them. You did it for Javotte. You love her!"

There is no checking the anger of suspicion. Leela went on:

"Now I know. Now I do know. You weren't man enough to admit."

Scornfully:

"Dear sweet little Javotte! You do so love to pose as her protector!"

Middleton asked—

"Would a denial be of any value to you?"

"No. No!"

She stamped a foot and snapped a thumb and finger.

"You can lie from now till some dago's knife gets to your throat—I'm a dago, too—and I wouldn't believe you. Why else did you do it? You don't know Holder. You know Javotte. Father has a temper—You—you Black Devil, you wanted to help Javotte. Oh, I should have known. You helped her before. You love her—don't you? Don't you? *You do!*"

Middleton was maddeningly unconcerned. He had no anger at all and scarcely any interest. He made no protests. If wishes were potent he would have fallen dead at her feet, then and there; though by the potency of the same wishes she might have stood him up again on his own feet a few hours later.

She did not realize that she had over and over seen with what composure he concealed his feelings; but she felt that he was indifferent to her, to her love and to her anger, and this sense of outrage increased her resentment.

"When I came into this room," she said rapidly, her eyes wide and full of fire, "I would have laid down my life for you. Now I will kill you!"

She made a gesture toward her breast; but Middleton, with eyebrows slightly lifted and a bored, weary expression on his thin, aristocratic face, seemed so much like a spectator at a dull show that Leela checked her dramatic instinct and contented herself with abusing him.

When she paused for breath he asked, unruffled, if she cared to have the use of his car in returning home.

"With you! I let you take me anywhere! I wouldn't—" she poured out the sentence; itself an echo of some retort drunkenly made across one of her father's tables—"I wouldn't let you drive my hearse to answer roll-call on Judgment Morn!"

"I take it from that you would prefer to have Silkeen Harry——"

"That thing! I'll kill him."

Her way of saying that was different. She was no outraged woman, but a woman with a feud. Silkeen was in her eyes a common gutter variety of gangster.

Middleton put out his hand to the telephone.

"Shall I have a taxi?"

"There is that Billy. He seemed a gentleman."

"Oh, yes. Yes. Very much so, indeed. Mr. Wingate it is. William Wingate. Known as Billy the Dude, so you see that his—ah—the gentlemanly quality you recognized is fully appreciated. I will call him."

As he turned toward the door Leela stared dumbly at his back, wondering just why she felt that she had been insulted. It was not quite clear, but she was sure that she had been.

Anyway when Billy came in she was suddenly pleasant. It was with the briefest of casual glances that she paid any attention at all to Middleton as she left the room.

The wolfhound followed her to the door, but she did not notice him.

And if, as some people think, it means the loss of the immortal soul to give over oneself to the blandishments of a woman, Billy in the small hours of that chilled morning threw away his chances of Paradise. It was

not wholly his fault, for he was made of the same clay as Father Adam, and earthenware is brittle; besides, Leela Cabron wished him for a slave, or rather for a spy at Middleton's elbow; and when she left him he was pledged to tell her of every move and word that Middleton used.

"For," said this barbaric witch-maiden, "Mr. Middleton is in great danger and we must watch over him. You will help me to do that; won't you, Billy?"

Had she asked him to help her steal the sun out of the sky while no one was looking he would have answered the same.

"Of course, Billy, you will say nothing to Mr. Middleton. He might not understand—but you do?"

"I'm on," said Billy the Dude with enthusiasm. "Youse c'n jes' count on it, not'ing 'll get by me!"

"I am sure of it, Billy."

And she patted his arm and left him.

WHEN Leela and Billy were gone from the library Middleton slowly walked across the floor once or twice. His eye was attracted to the overcoat he had removed, and this recalled the work of the evening before.

He lifted the coat and thrust a hand down into the pocket, and a very faint but remarkable expression came onto his face. He ran a hand into the other side pocket, drew it out empty, and tossed the coat carelessly onto the chair as he smiled cynically.

Leela had plundered the coat. It was fair enough. He had never returned any of the things that he took from her and her home. It had not been possible to return them, for everything that came to his hands was grist for his friend Drount, the jeweler.

Middleton lighted one of his cigarets, flavored with opium, and dropped meditatively into the chair before the fire.

Javotte? Ah! He understood why Holder loved. There was no mystery to that. She was full of delicate subtleties, of impenetrable feminine elusiveness, yet simple as a child—as a pretty, dear child.

Prismatic, that was almost the word for her. Her quick speech and slight accent were a delight; in her pleased moments her voice was soft as murmuring water, with a foreign inflectional richness.

Unlike Leela, she had been born in Italy. There was a sort of family feline temper in her, but she was of a gentler, truer nature than her brilliant, tempestuous cynical cousin.

Holder? Would he guess who had anonymously given into his hands the information that flattened Cabron? Would he dare guess why? This big, massive, impassive fellow seemed altogether another sort of man than he looked. There was the aggressive spirit of a fighter behind that Buddha-like immobility. There was still Cabron's vengeance to fear; for Holder to fear; for himself to fear too.

Middleton's lips moved a little toward an expression of amusement; but on his lips a smile was not always a smile. It might seem to mean anything from irony to indifference.

When Billy the Dude returned to the apartment Middleton had him come into the library; and he asked—

"You got Miss Cabron home all right, Billy?"

"Yes'r. Sure did," Billy answered with the buoyant ease of an untroubled conscience.

"Remarkable woman, isn't she?"

"I'll tell de worl'!"

Middleton's eyes shot toward him from their corners, and looked away.

"Sit down, Billy. Let us talk a while."

Billy dropped familiarly into a chair, fished out a cigaret, lighted a match with one hand by pressure of the thumb, shook out the light and tossed the match toward the fireplace, then sank back with an air of satisfied relaxation.

"Been a rather—ah—shall we say exciting night?"

"Ain't it! Gee, t'ings has happened all in a bunch. Dat's de way they hit youse. Zowie! Bim! Bam! Jus' like that."

"Yes. Pretty much like that."

Pause. Then:

"What did she coax you into promising her, Billy? I mean what besides the promise that you wouldn't let me know?"

Billy the Dude gave a quick, injured glance. He seemed pained.

"W'y Misser Middelton! Not'ing. She don't say ten words t' me."

Only a veteran police officer perhaps can fully realize the imperturbability with which crooks lie. Any kind of a crook, the cheapest little purse-snatcher in the game, is well fitted to outface St. Peter though he may have the Recording Angel's book before him. The little weazened rat of a moll-buzzer will stand before the Pearly Gate

wearing the greatest air of injured innocence imaginable, and tell how he has been mistaken for some rapscallion, and how the Angel of the Records has got him down all wrong.

"Ten words?" Middleton repeated. "I am surprized that she found it necessary to use so many."

"I don't get youse, Misser Middleton," said Billy the Dude without the guilty quiver of an eye-muscle.

"Well, Billy, she *got* us, as you call it. Harry and I had a rather successful evening. Did he tell you?"

"Dat guy? He don't tell not'in'. If he meets his own mother in de street, he wouldn't tell her his name. Dat's Silkeen"; and it was very nearly the truth.

"I had the trinkets in my pockets."

He pointed toward the overcoat, sprawled like something lifeless over the back of a chair.

"Miss Cabron asked you to leave the room, didn't she? . . . Yes. Oh, it is all right, Billy. Entirely the fortunes of war. But you were listening in on the little scene——"

"S'help me, Misser Middleton——"

Middleton gestured quietly in good nature, silencing the purjuring oath; and continued—

"She made a rather incomprehensible scene, don't you think?"

The big word in the question brought a puzzled wrinkling of the forehead, but Billy listened with open mouth.

"She acted very strangely, Billy, until—you know why—she saw it was to her advantage to leave abruptly and in anger. To help deflect our attention from the empty pockets of the coat."

"Well I'll be ——," said Billy, which was probably the truth.

Middleton in his turn was being deceptive. He had a strong liking that amounted almost to affection for Billy the Dude, for Silkeen, for the wooden-faced Jerry, too; but he had no wish that they should be familiar with such intimacies of his life as Leela's love for him; but since he knew that they were, or at least that Billy was, sure to have listened, he took the pains to try to make it appear that she had played a clever trick.

He had a certain aristocratic sensitiveness, as well as a crook's discretion, about letting personal things be known.

Middleton's air of lazy amusement, his idle manner, the invariable gentleness that he showed, though it was often tinged with irony, suggested something baffling and impenetrable to the three men who knew him best. He exacted respect without demanding it. With an inexplicable air of part indifference and some kindliness he kept men who were fellow crooks in the attitude of servants.

"These women's queer birds," said Billy the Dude, discarding a cigaret-butt and lighting another.

He settled back oracularly, encouraged by Middleton's attention.

"There's Doll. She over to the hospital now, flat on 'er back an' flirtin' wit' two corpse-catchers—docs, y'know. If Silkeen gets onto 'em he'll go waltzin' right over dere an' bust her in de eye. Silkeen jus' gets bug-house when Doll starts her work.

"An' Dolly's de kind dat has t' get a wallop now 'n' then 'r she t'inks Silkeen's hookin' up wit' some ot'er jane an' starts a howl. She raves aroun' till ol' Silkeen gets bored an' he ups an' pokes 'er one. 'N' she's aw right again—f'r a while.

"Say, I seen her oncet in front of a lookin'-glass soakin' herself wit' a hairbrush handle right on de eye—she was dat proud of a black lamp Silkeen'd handed her she wants to make it worser! I don't get women at-tall. —— 'f I do!"

Middleton listened watchfully without stirring. He knew the strange, barbaric code of the underworld, and its savagery; though unlike Billy the Dude and Silkeen Harry he had not come up from it.

A world indeed, a jungle world, where police hunt and beasts hide; a world of mystery and sordidness, full of treachery, harsh vice, mean crime; where snitches prowl and stools shuffle along shadowed ways to reach the ears of a bull; where crooks and coppers buy and sell the rights of a sleeping city to be robbed—for be it chiseled above the doorway of Headquarters that no crook can make a living month in and month out without scratching the itching palm of somebody that wears a badge; a hiving-place of stunted, crouching savages, full of sudden revenge, strange unshakable loyalties, the martyrous loyalty of pal to pal; where a runt bold as a hophead on the grab may lead a gang of sneaks into desperate work; where illiterate men train, practise, study, with inexhaustible

patience the profitless art of thievery in its multiple forms, with the full foreknowledge that they must serve time and lots of it, or be suspected of buying liberty by rapping on pals; a place where fall-money makes accomplices of lawyers and helps judges to be respected by their bankers; a strange sort of land where women rejoice from the blows of lovers and sell kisses to strangers—women of quixotic tenderness and ardent sympathies, yet coldly merciless as a butcher selling meat, so much the pound; a strange, indestructible, ineradicable, unfathomable half-world, where girls die of old age in their teens and the best men crumble this side of thirty and only bums and mouchers get to a ripe old middle age; a hectic, tinseled, feverish world of disease, dope, wasteful lusts, hot night hours and uneasy days, with overloaded bellies when luck's good, whisky and tightened belt-notches when everything is on the blink; and for one and all sooner or later prison fare and the damning damp cell with jaundice and opium to stain the face death's color before life gets out; with always the sinister slim shadow of the knotted hemp overhead, or the more scientifically horrible chair with its straps dangling and groping like tentacles.

The underworld is lawless—with a code rigorous as that of the Medes and Persians; it is crowded with criminals, and the worse they are the greater their sacrifices and daring to help the friend. Its spawn swarms up out of shadows and alleys; its savages looted Babylon when she fell, Rome when the Goths came through the gates, Paris when the wild women marched on Versailles; and the broods of the criminal will join in the ultimate destruction of all the great cities of the earth.

The underworld is Civilization's own black shadow; it lengthens and spreads and deepens as shadows do with the upper world's growth; it is mockery of the heavenward climb made by those marching under silk hats and aigrets.

"I don't get women. Dey raise —— wit' a feller an' dey fall f'r anyt'ing at-tall—jus' as long as it ain't de trut'. But no frail ever forgives de guy what won't bust 'er in de jaw if he catches her chasin' aroun' after some ot'er geezer. She'll ditch 'im sure an' pan 'im f'r a dead un.

"Hones', Misser Middleton. A woman's a queer bird. She wants youse to make 'er do w'at she don't want to do. She'll argue like —— an' bluff youse, an' give you more reasons 'n a cat's got hair; she'll turn on de tears an' do a fit; but all de time she's prayin' to beat de devil that youse'll grab her by the hair an' pull 'er right along wit' youse. Gee! Dey are sure funny animals."

And when Billy had gone Middleton sat alone before the bank of red coals until a chill dawn peeped in at the windows. An emptied cigaret-case was on the stand by his elbow.

## X

STEALING is just so much lost motion unless the thief has a market.

The market is really the great problem in crookdom. Any clever lad can go out and take something away from somebody, but turning it into cash is where the big risk comes.

Any fence will squeal if he gets in a jam; between going up himself for receiving stolen goods and being forgotten if he will just tip the police to the real thief—it doesn't take a ouija board to tell what will happen.

The fence is the underworld banker, and like all world bankers keeps a watchful eye on opportunity's forelock, and nothing in the way of enterprise can succeed without him.

Some people say that Big Bankers point the way when armies march. Likewise a good fence will tip off his friends to the chance for a haul.

A good fence is not an old German Jew wearing skull cap and ragged dressing-gown in the back room of a lifeless pawnshop. The contents of women's snatched purses, of servant girls' plundered dressers, may be fenced in obscure dirty little joints; but the dray-loads of silken stuffs pulled from lofts, a carload of furs, stones and pearls of great price—these things find their way into the hands of big, reputable merchants, or otherwise crooks would have to quit stealing them.

Drount, just Drount in faintly ornate small letters on the little plush boxes wherein his choice *objets* were handed to customers of wealth and taste, had a small shop where the rent was enormous.

His workmen were few but of the best. His designs distinctive, his prices high. He imported. He had antiques. He bought, heavily at times. He sold, often to rivals

who envied his luck in the gem markets.

A few ugly, jealous things might be whispered among the trade about him, but pouf! What successful man escapes that sort of thing?

Drount knew his business. Also he knew the business of most of the other jewelers.

Jewelers are jealous people. They whispered together about Drount, wondered, suggested, conspired, tried little tricks on him. For instance, they bought unset stones of him and examined them carefully.

For instance, also, they sent a clerk with some stones of their own, and these were offered to Drount at an absurdly low price. Drount was agreeable, pleasing; he talked in his buoyant, fascinating way until the police arrived, whereupon he turned clerk and stones into their hands.

The jewelers were painfully embarrassed. They could not dare say it was a trick on Drount, and they had to take care that their clerk did not say so. It made the situation difficult. Particularly so as Drount showed an eagerness to get into court and testify against the rascally clerk, to make an example of him; and Drount kept making inquiries about the case. When would it come up? Why was there delay? There was no doubt as to guilt, was there? If so, what doubt?

Drount's was not in Maiden Lane, neither was it at Union Square; nor yet on Fifth Avenue; but it was in the neighborhood of fashion. The entrance gave an impression of bronze work. The entire front was bronzed; and as smokers will scratch matches any place, it was retouched frequently for there was nothing lax or shabby about Drount's.

Inside there was the laboriously studied air of repressed luxury. "Quiet refinement" is now the gibberish that expresses Society's disapproval of *noisy* refinement.

In the best circles the idea of culture is to suggest enormous wealth without displaying the check-book; an idea that was possibly originated, as it has been perpetuated, by a lot of impoverished aristocrats who inherited the family trappings and a depleted exchequer, or at least one unable to compete with mushroom millionaires.

Drount was an artist, or anyway his workmen were artists; and it gave him pride that his store was so exclusive that he could not possibly have paid expenses except for his ingenuity.

He played the quiet-refinement game to the point of impudence. He could charge forty dollars for a plain walking-stick with a thin silver band and imperturbably indicate the faint small "Drount" on the band if any one asked what made the value.

Drount had more than enough humor to see the joke in his way of life, and he knew that New York pays for the trademark, and has no other way of knowing value, in fact doesn't greatly care for any value but the caste fraternity of exclusiveness. But after all the only way a fifty-dollar bill can be distinguished from a ten-er is by the trademark.

His impudence had got recognition for his name. He could carry it with high-handed ease because Drount's was a fence for gem thieves. There are not more than a handful of good ones in the world, and many of them fenced through him.

He gave about thirty per cent. of the actual value and offered a safe, sure market. It was then no wonder that he was genial and charming; for Drount was a gracious charlatan, quite aware of his attractive appearance in ladies' eyes.

His dark hair swept back with artistic curve from his high forehead. His eyes were full of life. He was no more French than a Dutchman, but he had cultivated a little shrug and other Gallic mannerisms that gave him a great advantage in the jewelry business. For some reason, perhaps imaginable, fashionable jewelers have a crepuscular, low-voiced manner not wholly unlike the anteroom whispers to a death-chamber where heirs are wondering what the will is like.

MERWIN MIDDLETON sauntered into Drount's with the half-bored air of one about to buy something for a girl he did not want; but he smiled as much to himself as at the young man who came to meet him.

Middleton had as many *alias*-es as he needed, and by one of them he was known at Drount's.

"Mr. Drount," said the young man, "will not be busy long."

There were no customers about. There seldom were. Only plebeian shops are overrun with people. Nobody did anything so

vulgar as trade at Drount's; they consulted, gave commissions, had designs executed.

A few antiques were under a large case, each piece with an area of satin around it. A few miniatures were under another case, with the first Mrs. Rothchild, hair parted triangularly and violet eyes, soft as a nun's modestly upraised, placed remote and aloof.

This was one of Drount's friends, so the young man talked with effort to be entertaining:

"— this ring, early Etruscan. Really is, as you can see by the beading."

He lifted it from the case to Middleton's hand. Middleton examined it idly and gave it back, nodding ambiguously.

The young man jumped to another subject. Perhaps miniatures would be of interest.

Middleton was polite but a little preoccupied.

The young man spoke of the crime wave and Middleton glanced interestedly.

"— getting to be appalling, really is. Robberies, burglaries, hold-ups."

"How do you account for it?"

The young man rambled for a minute with an impromptu conjectural theory, then mentioned the increasing daring of the robbers.

"—Rawlinson's last night. A dinner party—you saw the papers of course. A dinner party, a dozen people at dinner. The two bandits came right in to the dining-room. Awfully daring thing. They must have worked quick to run the servants into a closet and get into the dining-room before the guests were suspicious. They made an enormous haul. You know, sometimes I think if men have that much nerve—why, they're entitled to what they can get."

"Do you?" Middleton asked indifferently, eying the slender, stiffly tailored and starched young fellow appraisingly.

"Yes, sir; I do."

"Every crook in the city agrees with you," said Middleton, and turned away to pretend to examine a collar of platinum and diamonds enthroned regally in a case with a few elongated lace pins stationed at a distance like pages in waiting.

The young clerk blushed slightly and felt a moment's hot anger at something so nearly like an insult. Here was this fellow, a friend of Drount's, rich and idle, with no problems, no worries, nothing to trouble him. It was —— unfair.

Drount came from his office with a stately old dowager, her shoulders burdened with bushy furs. She was slightly near-sighted, and her skin had the drawn parchment appearance that sometimes comes when the face has been operated on for the removal of wrinkles.

She peered with almost conscious rudeness at Middleton, then passed on.

When she was gone Drount took Middleton's arm affectionately and led him to the office.

"—a cold-blooded old chieftainess. A ha-ha! She only wants me, Drount, to keep her in jewelry for the good it will do in building up my clientèle. Looking after my interests, she is. That's not why I gave in. No-no."

"You did give in?"

"My boy, can't you hear her saying as she fingers some friend's lavallière:

" 'So Drount imitated my necklace for you, did he? Why it *does* look exactly like mine. I never cared for it—gave it to the maid. Maybe she sold it *back* to him.'

"Oh, my boy, I know them. I know 'em. And you can't get away from them any more than you can get away from landlords. Not if you are in business. I admit that she was more direct than most—usually there is the little fiction of a charge account on the books.

"And there isn't a really exclusive shop in town that doesn't pay tribute of some kind—in some way—to somebody—and that body is a woman, every time. Every time, m'boy. Bless their dear hearts, they just can't help being greedy little grafters.

"But even an old chieftainess like that has—no, not charm exactly—but anyway she can make you feel gallant while you are putting your neck under her heel. I feel very gallant now."

He swelled his chest and patted it in amused self-mockery.

Middleton sat patiently, hat in hand, his cane between his knees, listening with no apparent interest but some politeness.

"If it weren't—" Drount rolled his eyes in jest—"for their dear little tricks, what a dull old world this would be!"

"Yes," Middeton agreed with an oddly significant intonation.

Then Drount clapped his hands together and rubbed them. He hitched a chair a

little toward Middleton and leaned over confidentially:

"That Rawlinson dinner, m'boy—I see by the papers it was a success. But by ——, boy, you were crazy to take a chance like that. Who was the other party with you?"

"Silkeen."

"I have heard of him. He is a gunman, I believe."

"Is he?" Middleton asked with a hint of surprize.

"Why, didn't you know? Where did you ever meet him not to know that?"

Silkeen and Middleton had broken prison bread together. It is in stir, as nowhere else this side of heaven, that men bare their souls one to another.

But he said to Drount:

"I have known him in a way for a long time. Harry is wanted on so many charges he simply can't fix it. And that kind of fellow is always safe, though he may be a little reckless."

"I guess you're right," said Drount reflectively. "Yes, you're right."

He rubbed his hands again.

"Some nice things, weren't there?"

Middleton nodded.

"Two big brutal fellows," Drount laughed. "That is what the papers called you. Cut the telephone wires before you entered the house. Came in through the kitchen while the guests were waiting for their dessert. Mrs. Rawlinson is prostrated. Her necklace of matched pearls had been delivered only eight hours before. Unpleasant luck. Very."

He laughed, and, tapping Middleton's knee, added:

"It wouldn't have happened if she had got the necklace through Drount. You know—" he was serious, almost virtuous about it— "I never put you on to any of my customers."

"No, Drount, you haven't," Middleton agreed with ironic quietness of tone. "When you rob anybody here in the store it isn't worth while following them home."

Drount did not laugh. He had humor, but he did not consider that a joke. He was cynical, he made a jest of what he called his ingenuity; but like all crooks he had a little spot of honesty that he cherished, prided himself on, took seriously. The murderer may feel himself deserving of respect and trust because he has never beaten his wife; the wife-beater would scorn to pick a pocket; the dip may be righteous in his hatred of murder; and in the whole muster of crime's legion there is none so low, so utterly lost, from the Drounts to the pimps, but refuses to stoop to some sort of villainy. Every man is a Pharisee at heart.

Drount liked Middleton, but because he was just a little uneasy of that quiet irony and impenetrably half-amused air, he tried to treat Middleton with a kind of fraternal intimacy. Also, and this did much to increase Drount's respect, he knew Middleton's manner of polite indifference, of idleness, almost boredom, was the mask behind which an altogether different sort of man was concealed; and he was not quite sure just how dangerous this man might be. Undoubtedly he could be dangerous to anybody, for there seemed to be no audacity at which he hesitated.

"Well," said Drount, leaning forward expectantly and having his hands ready as he got to the subject of most interest to him, "you have the things with you?"

"No. I didn't bring them."

"Tut-tut-tut," Drount remarked, a little annoyed. "Beautiful things among them?"

"Yes."

"When do I get to see them?"

"I can't say exactly."

"Why, what's the matter, my boy?"

Drount was on the verge of becoming agitated.

"The matter is this: More people figured in the Rawlinson job than appeared in the newspaper account. There is some —I'll say misunderstanding, about the split."

"Who-all were in on it?" Drount asked as if he had the right to know.

Middleton inquired—

"To whom do you dispose of stuff that you know very well is stolen?"

Drount's countenance took on suddenly an expression of mild distress that his friend should so far forget the amenities of business as to make inquiries of that nature.

"Just so," said Middleton. "I too have some associates that would perhaps not thank me to pass their names about. You understand?"

Drount did, or said that he did anyway. He talked a little more about the Rawlinson jewels, asked some questions, got what he had to consider as the answers he wanted, then asked Middleton about the next job that was on the schedule—the Holder

job, of which Drount knew most of the details.

"Just as soon," Middleton replied, "as Dolly has been in the hospital long enough to have a complete alibi."

"Some wonderful things, wonderful! And I hear she was just some sort of cabaret performer."

"Strange what sort of rumors get about, isn't it? For instance, I heard that she was some sort of settlement nurse. And by the way, Drount, while I'm here I'll take a look at your receipts from the Relief Fund."

And Drount didn't know whether this was some sort of joke or phase of lunacy. He had never been quite sure from the first time Middleton brought up the relief of Europe's children and asked Drount how much he had given.

The first time, half as a jest but also a little deceptively, he had named a figure as his contribution; again when Middleton mentioned the matter Drount had named another figure; then explained, or tried to explain, the discrepancy by saying he had made *two* contributions.

Middleton, with almost intangible irony, had complimented him and said he would surely have the receipts framed for Drount, really insisted that he wished to do it. Here was the matter coming up again, and Middleton had a way of making him feel oddly uneasy.

"What makes you so interested in people way over there?" Drount demanded, just a trifle impatient.

"I'm not. No, not in the least. But I am interested in the welfare of my friends. You see, Drount, it is such a rare chance to buy your way into heaven I don't think it ought to be overlooked. You have given something over eight thousand. That's about one-third as much as the widow's mite, but——"

"As what?"

Middleton stood up, ready to go, saying:

"I suppose you mislaid the receipts. Too much like pride in your charity to keep them about. But I'll have something framed for you one of these days. Good-by."

When he had gone Drount wondered to himself—

"What the —— was he talking about, anyway?"

## XI

BILLY THE DUDE, looking as fresh, creased and shined as if he were about to apply for a job in the bank, was quarreling with Jerry—for about the same reason that an unspanked child teases the cat.

"—youse give me some pains where I ain't had none b'fore. F'r a guy wit' a nutshell shaped like a noodle on 'im you's de limit. You's al'us talkin' like a sick monk looks—a worm-bited crab-apple w'ats all dried up.

"When Silkeen croaks them guineas w'at mistook Misser Middleton f'r the King of Italy, youse howled like a Yid funeral. Youse ain't done beefin' yet. You seen dicks un'er youse bed. Jerry, you's full o' peanuts. Youse get your nightmares wit' youse eyes open, an' if a cop was snakes youse'd have de willies wit'out de trouble o' gettin' soused."

"You mark my word. Just remember what I tell you," Jerry answered with the sullen aloofness of a prophet badly misunderstood.

Billy grinned. Jerry was a grouch, just as some other fellow might be a brunette. Otherwise he was all right, and that didn't matter.

"W'at makes youse so leary o' dis Holder job?"

"I have my reasons," Jerry affirmed with a warning air of secret knowledge.

"Are dey col' feet?"

Jerry refused to rise to the insult.

"Doll's hit the hospital f'r an alibi, an' we knows more about dat house'n de guy that build it. 'S easier'n nippin' an empty bottle from a sick babe's crib."

"Some day—" Jerry began ominously.

"Some day you's goin' guess right. Don't let nobody discourage youse, Jerry. Youse jus' keep layin' your chips on de black. You's boun' to win sometimes. But w'y don't youse go in more f'r eart'quakes an t'ings? Wit' a gif' like youse got it's a shame to jus' monkey wit' cops an' crooks."

"Some day—" he began again, with heavier emphasis.

But Billy the Dude was gone.

## XII

VISITING 'people uninvited is full of uncertainties, particularly in sma' black hours.

Really the best time for a burglar is when everybody in the house has gone to a

funeral, so that he has both leisure and daylight. But the sneak has to trouble himself with unfavorable conditions and take all manner of chances if he makes a living for his girl, himself, a friend that's laying low, a hop-dealer, and a couple of detectives that come around every six weeks or so and shake him down.

The venomous feud between cop and crook is largely—not entirely, but most of the bitterness in it is largely—because the crook feels that the cop is no better than or different from himself except that he plays a safer game.

The fact is that the crook, like every one else, judges a class by the individuals of that class he knows best; and he knows that every time he nails a little swag there's somebody with a badge asking for a bit; and it is pretty hard for him to believe that the other policemen who are not shaking him down are not shaking down somebody; and when New York's police commissioner guesses that only eighty-five per cent. of the force are straight, the crook's view point, though wrong, is not wildly unreasonable.

The science of burglary as taught in reformatories and penitentiaries recognizes three general classes of workers in the residence district. The sneak just butts in on a chance, any hour of the day or night; he is usually hard up for dope and out to grab anything.

The second-story man is a specialist. He calls almost invariably while the family is at dinner, climbs a porch, goes through a window that is usually unlocked or jimmys it if necessary, raids the boudoirs while a pal stands below to whistle if anything looks bad. He hasn't just happened to call on this house, but has made a study of it; and he doesn't grab everything in sight. Not much. He picks and chooses almost as if paying money for what he took; that is, if he is a wise gun and doesn't want to lug around a lot of stuff that is easy to identify and that is likely to be traced back to him.

The third sort of prowler moves on a residence like a general attacking a walled city. First he gets his spies inside and gives them the chance to look around for a few weeks, perhaps months. He knows the habits and alarms of the house, where every room is and just about what is in the room. He knows where the servants are and how well they sleep; and neither watchman, alarms, dogs nor locks can keep him out, for it is his business to dispose of every danger and guard that the mansion owner can devise to discourage burglars. Fortunately it is only the very rich who are troubled by burglarious geniuses.

Burglars find New York an easy town to make a living in. It is full of what are known as boobs, both native and enticed; and many of these have a superstition that a special sort of private patrolman watching ten blocks of residences is some sort of protection.

Others may buy a patent burglar alarm. There are many, one of which is guaranteed to scare the prowler out of a year's growth by shooting a blank shell when a window is opened. Some ring gongs; and one stirs a buzzer discreetly by the bedhead of the owner so that he can slip down and pot the intruder.

Some people stick clothes-pins and doodabs through the handle of the back-door key to keep the burglar from using his slender nippers and pinching its nose.

There are some very wise people who nail down their windows and use bolt locks on their doors. They have learned that the ordinary window-lock checks the wily burglar for about twenty seconds, maybe thirty if he is a slow worker. A nailed window will detain him on the job for a minute, perhaps two, so there really is some advantage in using the hammer.

Every competent burglar carries a putty-knife, or one that will serve as such a knife, for long ago he noticed that all windows are puttied on the outside and he can remove a pane in no time hardly, and without disturbing anybody's sleep.

But it is after he gets into the house that a burglar's troubles really begin.

Many people sleep with a gun for a bedfellow.

There is one diabolical form of alarm that goes off when the unsuspecting intruder gently places his foot on a certain step of the stairs.

Nervous folk are always rigging up some kind of contraption, like black thread tied to a tin can full of nails, for him to stumble against.

Colicky babies break out and raise the ——. Poodles wake up and yap their heads off. Telephones ring.

And people have an exasperating habit

of hiding silverware and jewelry where it takes time to find it; but worst of all, in many rich homes there is often a lot of paste lying around and the poor unsuspicious burglar grabs it and ducks for a quick getaway. He talks to himself for days afterward.

Verily a burglar's nights are full of uncertainty. His disappointments are many.

And after he has once done time the strain is too hard for his nerves to stand up without getting jangled. If he doesn't hit booze, snow, needle, or hop, he goes crazy. If he does he goes crazy anyway. So there you are.

## XIII

NEW YORK is a sleepless sort of place. And though people don't do much walking along respectable streets in the ungodly hours, machines whisk out of shadows and go by with a flash of chiffon and something dark but white-breasted beside it. The heavy cord tires sing a strident sibilant to the pavement while the bright white eyes of a monster gone mad glare ahead; but in the distance an evil red coal winks and blinks back at you like a one-eyed devil perched on the bumper.

A big limousine, gray, aristocratic, imposing—"like a millun dollars on wheels"—swirled majestically around the block and drew up before the curb at a house which by some sort of coincidence happened to be about a block above the residence of Frank Holder.

It was near midnight, and a black midnight too.

The number-plates on the magnificent car had been stolen and substituted.

It was possible that some one within the house before which the car stood might look out at it and wonder; but the logical thing was to believe that the occupants had made a mistake in the street number and gone into the house next door.

If it had been a dinky little flivver somebody would have called a harness bull to pinch it. But it wasn't a flivver. It was palatial.

Jerry Peete, in leather cap and puttees, sat stiffly at the wheel and waited on and on, as well trained drivers are supposed to do.

A tall figure, with the composed air of dawdling indifference, had stepped out, looked toward the houses, walked hesitatingly a few steps as if not quite sure where he was, then gone on with more assurance. He disappeared.

The night was black. Burglars read almanacs. Also they grow cat-eyes. Give them a vague, half-grown moon sifting through shreds of cloud and they call it daylight. They are nocturnal animals, and show their contempt of the sun by snoring in its face.

As Middleton approached the Holder home he listened warily.

There were no footfalls before or behind him; and his own were softened; but if he had *not* heard a faint clucking sound from the shadows he would have passed on.

Silkeen was watching there.

Silkeen Harry was always the outside man on a big job. A very important person, the outside man; something of a sentry and a rear-guard. He must be level-headed, cold-nerved, yet alert, suspicious, able to sense danger from afar. If he makes false alarms it is pretty sure to ruin the job, for that night anyway; and if he doesn't spot danger in time to tip the office to his pals there is the dread chance of a pinch.

Billy the Dude said:

"Al'us youse can bet on it, dey'll never make no pinch off ol' Silkeen. Them slant eyes o' his see ever't'ing, but he'll stan' de collar an' hit de chair 'fore he'll let a pal get tooked. I know dat —— Chink. He's square. An' de only way dey'll ever get him to Headquarters is in a hearse. I'm tellin' youse!"

With the lipless, noiseless whisper that convicts use under the noses of guards just aching to catch them talking, Silkeen, who had already been on watch for two hours or more, said:

"Dey's somepin doin'. I don't make it. Billy's up to a win'ow now gettin' an earful. About half-hour ago some bird slips up on de doorstep an' right off de door opens and he goes in on his toes. Looks like some gun was on dis job t'night. 'F he likes good healt' he'd better git off it. Somebody hands him de combination to de front door. He mus' have a skirt planted in dere. Youse say de word, an' I'll put him in de air jus' as soon as he shows. Be easy pickin's."

"We'll see. We'll see Harry. It would be very careless of us to let him carry off—

Is Billy inside now?"

"Don't t'ink he is, but——"

Silkeen gave a long low *pss-s-s-st* and waited with ears alert for an answer.

"He mus' have gone in. I tol' him not to be a —— fool. I'll give 'im de office an'——"

Silkeen ran a skinny hand into his pocket and brought out two dried peas. He sent one upward so that it struck against the window with a noise that seemed very loud in the silence. It was a good cast. Anybody on the alert for a signal could not have failed to hear it; and night workers are always on a strain to catch the faintest click, scratch or cluck.

Silkeen dropped the other pea thriftily back into his pocket. Little pebbles would have done as well, but they were not always easily found, so he kept a supply of peas.

They waited, and no answer came from Billy.

"If dat guy queers dis job——"

Silkeen left the threat unfinished.

"It is easy enough to wait," Middleton said. "Maybe he is behind a curtain or something and can't move without being seen."

"Bet I c'n make 'im move," Silkeen answered with faint accent of menace.

They waited, listening for any sound.

They knew all about the Holder house, and how it was equipped with burglar alarms and slip-bolts.

With forged references, and some dexterity in luring housemaids away one after another, Middleton had sent Dolly after a place in the house; and she got it.

Dolly was Silkeen's girl. It was a plain case of Beauty and the Beast. She had a weakness for him, though she was as pretty a little blonde thing as ever smiled at a mirror. Quite recklessly she kept Silkeen, whose ugly face she adored, jealous as a Turk. She often said, quite cheerfully, that some day he would croak her.

She was generous, weak, kind-hearted, faithless and audacious. Without doubt she had winked at the doctor when he was helping her into the world, and she had just kept right on flirting.

Having learned as much as her friends needed to know of the Holder house and habits, it was up to her to get out of the way. If she remained in the house when the servants were lined up, looked over, quizzed, bulldozed, by the professional meddlers in other people's business, the detectives would have grabbed her. If she vanished, the detectives in making inquiries about the servants that had lately left would surely have got onto her; and the word would have gone out to all the stool-pigeons between the Battery and the Bronx, "Turn up Silkeen's Dolly." And the first time she poked her little nose out for a breath of fresh air, somebody would have grabbed her.

So Dolly merely fell and sprained her back. It was very serious; she was removed to the hospital.

Doctors can't tell anything about a sprained back. They had to believe what she told them about the pain. They even saw wrenched muscles in the X-ray, for she was very pretty. So they made her lie flat and drink through a tube.

A young doctor tried to interest her in nursing as a career. He lectured the nursing classes on sickroom hygiene. An older and wiser physician offered her a place as his secretary. When she said that she did not know typewriting or shorthand he said that was all right as he was a widower.

With Dolly suffering in the hospital, where she had been for ten days, nobody would be likely to think about her when the detectives began their querying about servants.

So it hapened that Middleton knew where all the alarms were—fastened to the windows of the first floor and basement. But the seeming security of the up-stairs, which was without porch or vines, had made similar precautions there seem unecessary. Besides, alarms had been put on both the front and back stairs.

Almost anybody who did not know anything about such things would have pronounced the house burglar-proof. But any fly-cop, if consulted in the matter, and Billy the Dude had happened to be mentioned, would have said something like this:

"Listen. I'll tell you something. I'd like to bet twenty dollars, real money, that the Dude would be into this house and ready to leave again in less than that many minutes.

"Give him a dark enough night and he wouldn't care how many people were watching for him. He's two-thirds monkey anyway; and he would put on rubber gloves—give him a grip, you see—and run up that

drain like a squirrel up a tree. He don't weigh nothing anyhow.

"Then he'd edge along the gutter till he got in line with a window. He'd pick a hall window. See? Then he'd hook a silk rope on the gutter, let himself down till he was right opposite the window. Then he'd swing gently till he got a foot on the window-sill. See? He'd open the window, give the rope a flip and loosen the hook, stick it in his pocket an' go through the house quicker'n a pete man through a tin can."

Unfortunately the fly-cops had sort of lost track of Billy the Dude. His old haunts knew him not. He moved about with caution, and he and Silkeen were lying low or going out only among friends that could be trusted—such as hung out at Tony Batteto's.

SUDDENLY Silkeen's left hand reached out in a warning, tense grip on Middleton's arm, and Silkeen crouched, automatic out, peering at the solid blackness.

Middleton had heard nothing, not though his ears too had been trained in a penitentiary to catch the faint furtive footfall of a screw the instant it sneaked onto the gallery.

Silkeen had gone through two prisons, leaving the last in company with Middleton when they departed without permission and amid the crack of guns. Silkeen's hearing was as sensitive as the sand-papered fingertips of a cracksman.

A door opened almost noiselessly, but Middleton could hear that.

They stood rigid, without breathing. The door was not fifteen feet away.

Middleton had an electric torch in his hand, but to light it might be the signal for guns to talk.

The door had opened, but no one came out.

Instead, here was a low, soft, clucking sound which Silkeen answered at once.

Billy was excited, but he had known better than to be careless in the way that he came out of the door. Silkeen might have plugged him. It wasn't likely; but waiting in the dark for the —— alone knows what puts a ragged edge on the best of nerves.

Besides, if you make a pal jumpy and get hurt, you haven't any holler coming. It's your own fault. He's the one that has a grievance for getting a scare like that.

"Say," he began reproachfully, "dat pea makes a roar like a cannon-ball. I t'ought de house was comin' down. Them parties never hear it. Dey got somet'in' on, b'lieve me. An' dey don't want nobody to get hep."

"W'at's doin'? W'at dey say?"

"What did you hear, Billy?"

"Say—dem——"

"Shh-hh-h" came a low, viperous warning from Silkeen. In his excitement Billy was letting his voice go to a loud whisper.

"He's shakin' her down hard. See? De jane tells she ain't got no jack. He comes back wit' somet'in' I don't hear, but she says:

" 'I got jewels. I'll yell I been robbed. Take 'em, you lousy bum, an' do a lamm!' "

"Did she say it that way, Billy?"

"Sure she did. Jus' dat way."

"Those words—like a real moll?"

"No, no. Oh, —— no. She says, 'I will give 'em to youse though youse is a dog, 'n' beat it!' Them ain't jus' her words, but youse get me. She talks kinda funny."

"Blackmail?"

"Guess 'at's it, Misser Middelton. I hear 'em say 'Cabron' an'——"

"Cabron!" Silkeen snarled.

"Cabron?" Middleton questioned with low insistence.

"Cabron, sure. Y'see dey don't make much noise wit' deir words. But dey sure had dat dago's name in de air. An' neit'er of 'em loves 'im."

"*He* ain't Cabron?" Silkeen demanded ominously.

"Aw ——, no."

"We'll get dat guy an' empty him," said Silkeen with an eye to business.

"Where are they, Billy?"

"In de library. I can't see much. Dey only got one glim goin'. Dey're keepin' quiet. I guess dey grabs dis chancet while Holder's off to Boston."

"Are you sure it is Mrs. Holder?"

"Sure I'm sure. Don't dat bird say, 'Mrs. Holder,' like a dead-un pullin' a joke in vaudeville? Yea-bo. He's got somet'ing on her. An' she's got somet'ing on him too. De way she pipes 'Cabron,' gee!"

"I am going up," said Middleton, fastening a mask of black silk over his face. "In the library? Up-stairs. If he comes down

first, go through him. Take everything he has, down to cigaret-papers. Find out who he is. Remember, if anything breaks, don't wait for me. Get away. Go back to the car and get away, quick. You understand?"

Silkeen grunted slightly and Billy said—"Sure t'ing."

TO BE CONTINUED

# Emperor of the Dragons

by F. St. Mars

*Author of "Union is Strength," The Anti-Hustlers," etc.*

THE emperor was the sole survivor of his mother's house. One of his brothers had murdered a brother; the murderer had failed to recover from an argument with a sister; a second sister had craved a new dress, and died in the process of struggling out of the old one; a third sister had embraced a water boatman (who is an aquatic demon) and found she had embraced death instead; yet another sister had got into a hole—in two senses—already rented by an eel, and had never got out again; several brothers and sisters had gone a-fishing, and had themselves been fished.

And now only the emperor, as he was fated one day to be, remained, as unlikely looking an emperor as ever you set eyes upon.

You see him stalking a tadpole, a cockroach-like, obese accident, with pads where his wings one day would be, the face of a nightmare, goggle eyes in his head, his brain in his chest, and lungs in his several tails, and you may know him as a dragon-fly in the making, but at present only dragon without the fly. Further, he was one of the largest of several species of dragon-flies, a very king of his kind.

Since the emperor only crawled slowly, however, and the tadpole swam hither and thither, it looked pretty safe for the tadpole. But the emperor could never have been meant to be an emperor had he not kept a few surprizes up his jointed sleeve.

Suddenly the emperor shot all the water out of his lungs between his tails, as one squirts water out of a syringe, and the force thereof hurled him up through the water as if he had been fired from a spring. Smart it was, and a fine surprize, but it just failed to reach the fleeing tadpole by a quarter of an inch, a miss which you might think would be as good as a quarter of a mile. But what is a little thing like that to an emperor?

This one kept his lower lip for *contretemps* of such a kind. The said lower lip was half as long as the whole beast, but folded up on a hinge. Let down, it again unfolded another hinge, and doubled its length. At the end were two claw-like hooks. And the emperor could shoot the whole contraption out with rather more speed than that revealed by a jack-in-a-box, and no less suddenness.

Thus, then, the tadpole was caught, just at the moment he had got clear away, and was hauled back to the real jaws in the emperor's mouth, and—beheaded.

The emperor, however, did not feed on his tadpole long. He dropped it, and, in a convulsion of fury, turned upon a worm that had dared to move in his sight, only the worm he did not kill, because the worm

seemed unkillable. Leaving the worm, and writhing with a new, strange pain that had come upon him, the emperor crawled across the pool to the base of a water-lily, whose broad, plate-like leaves above cast a cool cavern of shade far down into the stilly depths.

It would appear that the emperor had been taken ill—that he had been poisoned, perhaps, by one of his victims. In truth, however, he was merely about to change his clothes.

He would be nearly two years old, perhaps, by this time, and, like most people, he had changed his clothes during that period several times, for the very simple reason that he grew out of the old ones. The phenomenon always made him feel rather unwell and off his feed—the only time, indeed, he was not hungry, though this was not to be wondered at, seeing that he changed everything, literally, from tip of head to end of each six feet. Never, however, had his tailoring made him feel so bad as now.

For many hours the emperor kept very quiet in the shade—all the demon gone out of him for a space. Thereafter a great desire for fresh air, real fresh air—not the diluted kind he condensed out of the water by means of the lungs placed at the base of his tails—came upon him, and he slowly climbed the stem of one of the water-plants growing in the semi-transparent world around.

He was checked a little at the surface film, which is like unimaginably fine elastic, and not easy to break through, even for an insect of his considerable size, but the vision of a ghostly fish shape growing, so to speak, out of the water-haze below, urged him on, and he was soon up the stem and out in the open.

For the first time in his life the emperor found himself looking down upon the water as we see it; for the first time felt the free wind of heaven; for the first time basked in the sun. And this was more of a daring adventure than it looked for him, seeing that his breathing apparatus was made for use under the water only, and not above it. It looked as if the emperor were going to commit suicide. But he did not—he split his back instead.

NOW if you think that this would be much the same thing as committing suicide, it shows that you are not *en bon rapport* with the private life of such emperors. This one was but changing his suit, and with it his whole life, for lo! out of the loathly cockroach-pantomime-mask incarnation there uprose, damp and limp at first it is true, and with no end of a struggle (he had taken firm hold of the stem with the claws of his old self, however) a regal, splendid, glistening dragon-fly, full blown, full grown, and all brand new.

We may take stock of him while he dries and hardens his plating; while he shakes out his wings—till that hour folded miraculously in the aforementioned wing-pads upon his old self; while he straightens out each groggy leg, tests his feelers, and, above all, polishes and sharpens his terrible jaws—a brand new set, too, and like shears. No more "mask" under-lip for him now.

We may see that his very long and very slender body was uniformed in the palest of pale blue, so delicate a tint that it might almost have been green, with a "bloom" like the "bloom" upon a peach. In certain lights, though, when the sun caught him, he looked white, and I have seen him silver.

His two big and three small eyes, that were in themselves a marvel, the former having some ten thousand lenses, looked like rubies, and together covered nearly the whole of his head. His chest portion was broad and strong, to carry the immensely powerful flying muscles. His very large wings, a double set, strongly suggestive of a biplane's vans, though colorless, looked like wafers cut from the very diamond, such was their wonderful polish, and his jaws—well, his jaws were the weapons of a dragon, that's all.

The sun had been up some time, and had drunk all the dew off the grass, and the "heat flurry" was beginning to dance over the level corn, next morning, before the emperor "took the air." Mind, he had never flown before in all his life, yet he removed from that cool, green stem he was on, and out across the sunlight over the pond, with such amazing speed that to the poor, slow human eye he seemed to have just burned up in a dazzling streak of rainbow hues, which represented the glitter of his wings.

So astonishingly quick indeed was he, that not only must the blue-bottle fly, bustling across the pond, have been dead in his jaws before he knew what had killed him, but when the dragon-fly himself backed air to settle upon a drooping willow spray, he simply seemed to have dropped out of nowhere. And that was just the dragon-fly's

way. In an insect world of magic flight his flight was the most wonderful of all, I think. It was just one of those things that created him emperor.

The emperor fed them, as almost always, with the furious haste of a famished beast, his jaws working like reaper knives, so rapidly that in a few seconds there was nothing except a few shavings of hard skin left upon the leaf to show that the blue-bottle had ever lived at all.

For a few minutes after the emperor sat still, cleaning his face vigorously, cat fashion, except that he spun it round at will, as if on a pivot, in a most uncanny and disconcerting way rather peculiar to dragon-flies.

Then he was up and away above the dazzling waters of the pond, and slowly flew the length of it, with a strange, almost mechanical tenseness, and, as it were, leashed reserve of power that made his flight all his own. Now he went astern with unexpected swiftness. Now he hung poised, a quivering focus of rain-bow gleams. Now he whizzed ahead in the wake of a small golden-bronze wasp, that saved itself only by a headlong dive into a brier-bush, whose exquisite pink flowers hung like swung censers in the shade.

Now once more he was a thin, tenuous line, drawn aloft from pond to sky, defying the eye to follow. Again he was a silver dart, fired from the heavens, and not shattered to a hundred pieces upon the ground only by some miracle; and then, as he again hurtled horizontally ahead, one saw that he was in pursuit of a metallic green-bronze green-bottle fly, and even in the same instant his bristle-spined, steel-trap forelegs shot out—much as he was wont to shoot out his long underlip in that other life—and that "bottle" went with him, "pinging" aloud, but fast held, to a greyish bog myrtle leaf, whereon he fed.

Much fuel, it seemed, was needed to stoke the emperor up to the almost bursting high pressure of fine-drawn speed and energy; but once he was on the wing, he became the acme of speed incarnate, just as, once settled, he was the embodiment of repose.

But this time the emperor did not get time to wash his face and hands, as I think he always liked to do after a meal, being of cleanly habits that would shame even a cat. Something had taken fire in the sunshine, and streaked across the pond.

The emperor, whose great eyes seemed to miss nothing that moved or breathed—saw it, and darted in its wake like a finely-drawn silver wire.

One had just time to see that the other was actually another dragon-fly, and then the battle of wing science commenced.

The rival emperor shifted about that scene like reflections from a hand-mirror in the sun flashed on a wall. Only for brief fractions of a second, and at intervals, was it possible to see them, and to note that the emperor was always in the same place, and so close behind his foe that the two seemed to be a single piece of mechanism.

Both knew that no kingdom is large enough to hold two emperors. Both knew, too, that the invader had broken a very rigid law among dragon-flies in trespassing upon the emperor's beat, a law which, except in pursuit of prey—which recognizes no frontiers—is not made to be lightly broken. Perhaps that was why the invader, who was, of course, a male, never turned during that forked-lightning chase, to do battle, never seemed able to shake off the consciousness of guilt.

He darted with the speed of light, and on the angles of Euclid, up, down, to port, to starboard, ahead, but never astern—for there, as if towed, and a bare inch behind, reached the steel-trap forelegs of the expressionless, deadly emperor—till he was, eventually, hunted off the premises.

Then it was, at last, that the emperor turned and glided back slowly, white against the somber green of the oaks, as an aeroplane "caught" by a search-light. He showed plainly, flashing like a rapier-point, making passes at the gnats and midges as he came. One beheld him alight to devour one of the latter, foiling his magnificence against a pure star of marguerite; and one realized, too, that in that act he had struck his hour of fate.

If he had not settled there the hen-sparrow would not have turned flycatcher, and trapezed down with more rapidity than one would have given her credit for, from the rustling birch-tree above. She hit the flower but not the emperor. He seemed to have moved himself from that spot to another a dozen feet away in the very instant that her beak struck.

The sparrow returned, fluttering, to her tree, but a bold, bad thrush, skimming

above the grass at that moment, saw the gleam of the dragon-fly poised, and, without altering speed or course, tilted at him as with a lance. He darted astern and upward almost magically, letting her by beneath him with a rush that carried her far.

As if, however, the birds had conspired, a painted finch instantly fell upon him out of the spiky labyrinth of a bush, and although the dragon-fly was not there when the finch was, so to speak, and was up when the bird was down, and down when the bird was up—and all with a soullessness, and an apparent absolute lack of haste in the instantaneousness on the insect's part that made one marvel—the finch was more of a fluttering "sticker" than he looked. He was not lightly shaken off.

He darted down again and again. He watched for the dragon-fly to settle—perhaps because he was like us, and could not always see him when he was whizzing about in the air—and then pounced. And in the end the emperor lost patience—I can scarcely imagine him really afraid—and scintillated away, like a finely drawn rainbow thread far out over the field, and the pond knew him not. That is, for a space. One knew that he was sure to come back.

The languid hot minutes drowsed on and on, uncounted and unnoticed; the swifts tore like shrieking arrowheads across the arc of heaven; the doves crooned languishingly among the hanging drapery of the willows. Still the emperor did not return. Why? One of those sudden heavy clouds of summer that threaten so much, and do nothing but pass away, leaving the scene brighter than ever, had obscured the sun.

Far across the fields the emperor, in his angry, ruffled retreat, had settled. A cool wind came fanning over the grass, and the emperor became no more than an inert lifeless twig. The emperor hated the dullness spelled by cloud; hated, too, the slightest cool; and, although he could fly on sunless, chill days, he cared not to do so unless forced. Wherefore, remained he utterly quiescent, a sun-worshipper self-confessed, and one to whom the rays of the sun were fire, and life, and—all.

Some time did he have to wait, cleaning himself now and then with that fury characteristic of his toilet-making, before suddenly the sun and a wildly galloping horse appeared together. The horse was a thoroughbred, famous, and of priceless worth.

Just now, though, he was a terrified, stampeding quadruped, tearing blindly toward some barbed-wire, in the toils of which, if not stopped, he would ruin himself past all hope and for ever. And the cause of his fear?—was the gadfly. The gadfly whose young live upon the living horse—the gadfly, hated and feared beyond whips! The gadfly, with the high-pitched, twanging hum, and the somewhat waspish outline.

Gadflies? I do not know whether—as you and I and the horse could—the emperor heard the dread fly above the thundering hoofs. I know that he saw—his superwonderful eyes saw—and, seeing, he went.

Scarcely a second later the emperor reappeared, or, at least, there were sparkling dots, and dashes, and zigzags in the air that indicated his presence above the horse's head. He was hunting the hunter, pursuing the terrible gadfly.

Ten seconds later the emperor was seated momentarily upon the horse's back—surely that thoroughbred never had so strange a demon jockey, and the piercing twang of the gadfly ceased. Then he was gliding smoothly down to a spray of honeysuckle, and the gadfly went, unwillingly, with him, and the horse was pulling up—in time.

Finally the horse walked across the field toward the pond, which was the safest place he could choose, and the emperor, having finished his meal, was just polishing his jaws preparatory to a return to his "beat" when the empress arrived from—out of the sun!

THE emperor saw her more quickly than his great eyes saw anything, but—well, seeing a damsel dragon-fly is one thing, capturing her heart is another.

The emperor knew this, apparently, and they made some very pretty play in the air together, showing off most beautifully their exquisite wing-power, but never getting any nearer a match. The emperor, of course, was instantly and madly in love. She was the only female dragon-fly he had ever seen, and his kingdom, possessing all else desirable, sadly lacked an empress.

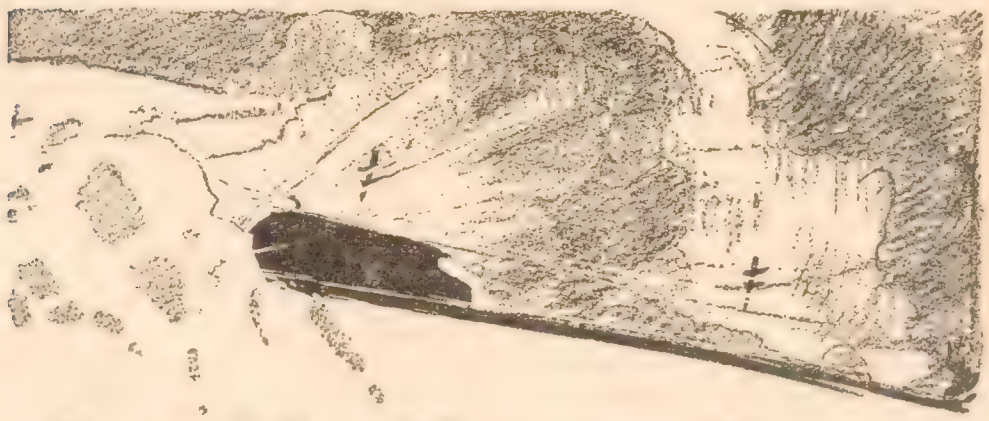
The lady, however, would permit approach no nearer than three inches. At every dart the emperor found himself met by steely, spined forelegs, and implacable jaws. The beautiful one—not so beautiful as the emperor, though, be it whispered—

appeared to have every intention of stopping on her own "beat," and none at all joining the emperor in his. Yet she must, somehow, he knew that.

Then instinct whispered in the emperor's ear—if he had one—and he understood. At the end of his tail he carried a pair of finger-like claspers, not put there for nothing. One way, and one only, was there of meeting this contingency in safety, and that way he now took.

While the female dragon-fly was thoughtfully turning an unhappy gnat into mincemeat upon the leaf of a water-lily, the emperor, like a spark, pounced upon her. By the scruff of the neck he seized her in his claspers, and flew off round the pond, towing her ignominiously after. In that position she could not very well do much harm. He had got her on the very tip of his tail by the back-hair, so to speak, where she could neither chew him up, nor hinder the free working of his wings. She simply had to go, and she went—gnashing.

That, however, was only the elopement. The wooing would have to come later, but the emperor somehow felt that—providing that invader fellow did not reappear, and fight, and beat him—she would, when she saw the delectable pond, and remembered how absolutely necessary is water to dragon-fly eggs, and what a fat, well-stocked preserve the pond made for his "beat," she would accept him. And she did—an act which completed this story, and began another.



# Juice Hog Twenty-Seven

## by Kenneth Gilbert

*Author of "Heart of the Crew," "The Radio Ray," etc.*

POETICALLY speaking, Valhalla, the Transcontinental's high line division point in the Cascades, is a wind-swept aerie at the summit of a noble peak. In reality, however, it is a hastily built little railroad town, smeary with locomotive grime, noisy by night as by day with the rattle and bang of switched cars and the clang of ball-pein hammers on metal, and it clings as if for dear life to the south side of Saddle Mountain.

Eastward and westward the Transcontinental slopes downward in grades that are nearly three per cent. steep, and up which giant engines toil ponderously, bringing machinery and manufactured goods from the East for the Coast, and returning with products of the Pacific Ocean and lumber from the fir-matted area about Puget Sound.

The climb to Valhalla has been the curse of the railroader since the Transcontinental pushed its steel westward to salt water. It comes at the end of a tedious day for the nervy men who handle heavy trains on the mountain slopes, and, although the grade on either side of Saddle Mountain is not more than eight miles long, it means a slow

pull of the "maybe-you-get-there-and-maybe-you-don't" kind, for there are many deep gravel fills, and under the softening breath of a Chinook wind the track grows treacherous in Winter.

A drag of cars is in danger of slipping sidewise into a cañon three hundred feet deep. It has happened more than once.

And the climb, steep as it is, never could be negotiated by a single Mallet with a decent drag of cars. Always there was one engine pulling, and another pushing. But that was before the day of the "juice hog," the two hundred and eighty-six ton electric engines which the Transcontinental put on these grades.

Current or "juice" for four hundred miles of the system was brought from two big hydro-electric plants. The result was that the huge "juice hogs," with thirty-four-hundred-horse-power motors—one motor coupled to each of the eight driving wheels—would snake thirteen standard steel cars of nine hundred and sixty tons up the Saddle Mountain grade unassisted. Their traction power was marvelous.

They looked good to Danny Malone, who had been pulling freight up Saddle Mountain for ten years. There was something more human about a big Mallet, but the electric engine was so superior to its steam rival in matter of pulling power that he declared himself in favor of the juice hog. And with ten years of service to his credit he got the 10,027 or, as she was known, the "twenty-seven."

"Some day I'll couple her to Saddle Mountain and pull the peak out by the roots," was the way he fondly boasted of his engine's power. And, to one who would run his eye over the bulky monster, so long that she had to be jointed like a snake in order to take the sharp curves, Danny's statement seemed less of an exaggeration than it sounded.

When the twenty-seven got her tail tied to something, and settled down to pull, that "something" was almost certain to come along too, roots and all. Danny didn't need to worry about the careless firemen burning out crown sheets, or about leaking tubes, or water-tanks. He simply moved the controller handle and invoked the mighty power of a plunging mountain torrent hundreds of miles distant.

Because the twenty-seven was easily the best-pulling hog of the lot, and because Malone was just what he was, a genial, kindly Irishman with a heart built on the same large scale as his engine, the two were sworn by on the high line division. If some minor railroader, perhaps a humble car "tink," got into trouble, he needed but to tell Danny of his worry in order to command everything the juice hog's master possessed.

And because this was so, the men of the high line never could understand why big Tom Burke, who pulled the Transcontinental's crack flyer, seemed to dislike Danny Malone for no reason at all; a hatred that, instead of cooling with the years, grew hotter. Burke, burly, black-browed and blustering, seldom mentioned it except when he was in his cups and then he got away with it solely because of his size, for it rankled them to hear Danny maligned.

The flyer's engineer, as is true in most such cases, never spoke slightingly in Danny's presence; the two talked as little as possible with each other. Malone, stockily built, a kindly twinkle ever in his blue eyes, was at first nonplused and worried by Burke's attitude; then he put it down as something that could not be helped; so, while never avoiding Burke, he maintained aloofness. When word came to him of the things Burke had said, he never replied in kind—he was no backbiter—but merely smiled his queer, quizzical smile and shifted the topic.

The truth was that Burke was jealous; jealous of Danny's popularity. He wanted to bind men to him as did Danny Malone. He was senior engineer of the division, a position won by years of service, and he felt that he was being cheated of his due, never sensing that what he sought could not be attained except in the unassuming way which was natural to Danny, and which welled up from the springs of a kindly heart. And so the honors, such as they were, went to the freight engineer instead of the passenger pilot.

But while Danny never admitted the existence of the thing, the train crews, perhaps grouped about a coal stove in some lonely way-station while waiting for a "meet," often spoke of it and predicted that the time would come when there would be settlement between the two. The passenger pilot could fight, that they knew; and you had but to take one look at the blocky form of Danny Malone and his eyes

that could become brittle-hard, to know that he could, too—and would.

In fact, the long-expected clash seemed to have arrived one Winter's night in Valhalla, when a blizzard whooped through the mountains. Danny and the twenty-seven had been sent down to Startup—the little station on the east side of Saddle Mountain where the climb to Valhalla begins—to bring Number One, Transcontinental's train de luxe, to the summit of the "hump."

From Valhalla, Burke would take her through to the Coast, his regular run. Ordinarily, Danny Malone and the twenty-seven pulled nothing but freights up the hill, but the wet snow was packing solidly on the tracks and an engine of the pulling power of Danny's juice hog was needed.

And they had arrived safely at Valhalla, albeit an hour late. Danny had lost no time on the hill, despite the snow; Number One was an hour late when she reached Startup, but Markham, the night-trick dispatcher, was fuming about the delay the train was sure to suffer before she reached the Coast. There was not time between Valhalla and the Coast to regain the lost hour, despite the fact that it was down-grade most of the way. And in his fussing, the dispatcher had an able second in Tom Burke who saw a chance to thrust at Danny.

"A mistake ye made, Markham," he asserted, with a freedom born of long service on the road, "in not sending one of the lighter and faster passenger engines to Startup for Number One. What can ye expect with a lumberin' old hog like the twenty-seven, and a putterin' freight puller like Malone, who'd lose time goin' down hill if he'd——"

Involuntarily Burke left the sentence unfinished and turned. The door which they had heard open quietly had closed with a bang. And there was Danny Malone, his bronzed cheeks reddened, not only with the tang of the blizzard from which he had just come, but with a fire that burned within him. His blue eyes had hardened to the sheen of polished steel.

Though Burke towered over him fully a foot, Danny struck, driving his right fist full against the point of Burke's jaw and stretching the traducer of the twenty-seven the length of himself.

In an instant the bigger man had regained his feet tensed for the attack, but Markham dashed between them.

"Cut it out!" he ordered. "You, Burke, take your orders and get Number One to the Coast as fast as the —— will let you. And you, Malone, sign the register and get out. The idea of you fighting in my office! The idea! For two cents I'd get both of you slammed with a thirty-day layoff."

"But he slandered me and the twenty-seven," insisted Danny stubbornly, as if trying to convince himself that he had actually heard Burke's sacreligious words. "He slandered the twenty-seven, which pulled Number One through those drifts from Startup without losing time, in spite of her bein' only a freight engine." His eyes were wide at the injustice of it.

"Oh rats!" snorted Markham. "You engineers make me sick. This is a —— of a time to get sentimental. We've got to get Number One to the Coast quick or tell somebody why."

And so the grand finale of the ill-feeling between Burke and Malone, about which the high line railroaders had often prophesied, fizzled after a flash. But still the men of the high line insisted as they discussed this latest phase that the end could not be put off forever. It seemed logical that Fate was hurrying toward a climax, moving as usual in her own subtle way.

THERE came a time a few weeks later when all the glittering white phalanxes of Boreas seemed concentrated on the single idea of blocking traffic on the high line division, and putting gray hairs in the heads of train crews and dispatchers. It began to snow while a gale of unusual violence roared down from the pole. And how it did snow! Only those who have lived through a Winter in the Coast Range can appreciate what a real snow-storm is like. The heavily laden clouds from the Pacific, steamed up by the tepid Japan current in the face of a chill northeaster, sweep billowing toward the summit of the Cascades.

And soon they have reached the freezing point, and they fall shattered in soggy flakes that are damp and clinging; piled by the wind into wet drifts that offer the maximum resistance to the great rotary snow-plows. Fifteen and twenty feet deep the snow becomes in the cuts.

When this happened, system gave way to chaos on the high line division. Schedules went by the board. Regular trains fell so

far behind their running time that they were annulled and sent through as specials—whenever they could get through. Double and triple shifts were worked by the gangs trying to keep the line clear.

Dispatchers fidgeted with their train sheets, and prayed that the storm would end or relax long enough for the plows to catch up with the drifts. Train crews were started out in the face of the blizzard, not knowing when they would reach the next division point.

Nearly every side-track along the division had its quota of stalled trains. Had coal-burning engines been depended upon the effect would doubtless have been tragic, for the coal would have run short and the coaches become icy cold. But with light, heat and power being fed steadily through the single copper strand whose terminus was far back in the mountains, at the power-plant which had harnessed a waterfall, it was inconvenient to the passengers, though scarcely more than that.

Still, to the men of the high line division the fact that their section of the system was practically tied up struck a blow at their professional pride. A trunk-line such as the Transcontinental is like a main artery; let it become clogged at one point and circulation stops. And so they strove night and day to restore a condition of normality.

But still the storm lasted. In fact, the third day it grew worse. The flakes fell heavier, more densely and dank; the wind increased and swirled and packed them more solidly. The efforts of the gangs seeking to keep the line open seemed futile and pitifully ineffective. A feeling of hopelessness began to grow on the men; better let the blow spend itself, and then attack the drifts with the aid of a chinook wind.

A freak of the blizzard was that it seemed centered on the east side of Saddle Mountain. From Valhalla westward the line could be kept open, but between Startup, on the east side, and the division point at the summit, the drifts seemed impassable.

Late in the afternoon of the second day, just before the real fury of the storm set in, Danny Malone and the twenty-seven were sent to Startup to bring up a string of loaded box-cars. The snow was piled deep on the track when the twenty-seven eased down the grade, but the great juice hog, with a plow at both ends, whiffed it aside without trouble. But when Danny coupled on to the box cars and made ready for the climb he got orders to wait at Startup.

No. One was due any minute, the dispatcher said, and instead of bringing up the box-cars, Danny was to give the flyer help through the snow. But the minutes the dispatcher spoke of grew into hours and still Danny and the twenty-seven waited. No. One, with a light electric engine pulling her, was having trouble in the lowlands. The snow bothered her somewhat and on top of it water soaked through a section of weak insulation on her motors, causing a short circuit. It was fully eight hours that Danny and the twenty-seven waited before No. One pulled haltingly in, or tried to, rather. Before she came opposite the depot at Startup she dawdled to a stop, the smell of burning insulation about her. Her motors had gone dead, burned out.

The scent of charred rubber was as nothing compared to the sulfurous tinge to the language of her engineer who clambered out of the cab. Danny was waiting on the platform, the twenty-seven backed into the siding. As No. One's engine disgorged her pilot, Danny went forward to explain that he was there to assist. The engineer had by this time crawled under the huge machine to take a look at the damage. A moment's inspection satisfied him that it was serious and he swore feelingly as he crawled out and stood up in the dim glow from the cab. Danny stared in wonderment. It was Burke.

Malone had not known that Burke, for one trip, had been shifted to the run east of Valhalla, from his regular trip to the westward. Until Danny spoke Burke did not recognize him there in the swirling flakes and the passenger engineer was lurid in his characterization of the luck that had taken him off his regular run.

"I've orders to give ye a lift up the hill," announced Malone dispassionately. "If our engine is dead, I'll back down, hook on and put her on the side-track, then take the train to Valhalla."

"The —— ye will!" exploded Burke. "I'm going up there and get a few orders myself. And I'm going to tell that —— dispatcher what I think of him."

He stalked away toward the telegraph office.

However, he was not vouchsafed the opportunity to pour the vials of his wrath on the head of the harassed trick man at

Valhalla. The station operator had a message for him.

"Tie up at Startup until we can get a plow through," it said. "Snow too deep in cuts now to reach Valhalla."

"You could have made it if you had got here on time," declared the operator. "But the delay has changed everything. The storm is twice as bad as it was six hours ago and the cuts must be piled brimful. Nothing short of a rotary plow could get through."

Thereupon Burke broke loose. He cursed the dispatcher, the weather, his engine, the railroad and even the operator. He excoriated everything above or below ground that had contributed in any way to his troubles and he did it in such shocking language that the operator dropped the glass of the ticket window in disgust, leaving the engineer to hammer on the office door in his rage and invoke dire disaster on the heads of all.

Malone, who had followed Burke to the telegraph office, came in just then and, disregarding the other and his tirade, walked up to the telegraph window and rapped. The operator instantly lifted it, friendliness in his face, for he liked Danny.

"Any word—" began Danny, but just then Burke threw generalities aside. Here was Malone, whom he hated; the man who had knocked him down in Markham's office and had gotten away with it. His vituperation centered in a single word; a fighting one. The remainder of the sentence a blasphemous characterization of the twenty-seven, was literally jammed back between his teeth by Malone's right fist. And then they were at it.

That fight will endure in the annals of the high line division until the Transcontinental's rails become streaks of rust, abandoned for transportation in the air. The disparity in size between the two made little difference; it seldom does when each is strong, imbued with the fighting spirit and really aroused. It seemed as if the power of the giant electric engines both piloted had entered their veins.

A degree of science in the tactics of each, though Burke, whose fed-up hatred boiled within him, was too eager. He drove his left straight at Malone's face, over-reaching as the other ducked. Though his knuckles opened Malone's cheek as the latter shifted, the bigger man received a smashing counter in the ribs that jarred him to the boot soles. But he came back, more eager than ever.

The little building fairly vibrated under their efforts. Word of the battle had reached the railroaders outside, and without exception they abandoned their posts and crowded to the windows to see this thing which they had long prophesied would come to pass. The little waiting-room was left entirely to the fighting men. Inside his office, the door locked, the operator danced in impotent excitement. The big clock over the telegraph desk ticked off the seconds and minutes undisturbed while the men fought.

They battled in silence now, with the caution that comes when shortening breath warns of over-exertion, yet there seemingly was no lack of "steam" in their smashing blows. Though the faces of each were smeared with the red of combat, they fought on unknowing. Nor did the thought of quitting occur to either.

And then the end came abruptly, unexpectedly. Burke, forcing the fighting, had backed Malone toward the corner where a round-barreled little stove glowed cheerfully. The bigger man thought he saw an opening for his left, and he swung with all the weight of his body. But it was a trap. Danny moved agilely aside and as the other's body lurched forward, guard lowered, Malone drove his right fist against Burke's jaw with an impetus that came from his toes upward. The blow was clean cut and the force of it drove Burke aside and into the corner as if smitten with a sledge-hammer. His forehead struck the thick rim of the stove, and he slumped grotesquely to the floor and lay quiet.

Danny, his wide chest rising and falling like the bellows of a blacksmith; fists clenched, waited for Burke to rise. But the doors were thrown open now and the excited onlookers poured in. Cunningham, conductor of No. One, bent over Burke. Then he barked at one of his brakemen:

"Quick! Get that doctor in the second Pullman!"

For the first time fear stirred in Danny Malone. He bent over Burke. The smeared face of the big man was dead white where it was unstained, and from a wide cut on his forehead there welled slowly a clotted stream. A sudden horror seized Malone. What if he had killed Burke? In it there was no fear for himself, or the consequences

that might ensue; it sprang solely from his conscience—that maybe in the heat of this fight, clean-cut enough though it had been, he had taken the life of a fellow man.

As he sought to straighten out the chaos of thought that surged through his brain, there came bustling in the doctor, a business-like little man. With professional adeptness, he examined Burke, then looked at Cunningham.

"We've got to get this man to a hospital. Is there one near here?"

Cunningham shook his head negatively.

"Nothing nearer than Valhalla," he replied, "and the road is blocked with snow."

"Then he won't live four hours. Only an operation can save him."

Danny started. A wave of relief had swept over him at the first words of the physician. Burke was not dead, then. And then came a succeeding wave of despair. Burke would die unless taken to Valhalla. Yet Cunningham had spoken the truth; the road was blocked tightly with wet snow that packed more solidly every minute. Still, must they wait helplessly here while Burke, big, blustering Burke, who, mayhap, after all was no more than a spoiled boy, died on their hands?

Man, as a rule, comes to a decisive conclusion slowly. Yet, in a crisis, the mind works lightning-like; events and possibilities flashing before it like cinema photographs, each to be weighed and catalogued according to its importance. And Danny for the last few minutes, ever since Burke had applied the epithet to him, had been deciding quickly and acting quickly. He did so now.

He rebuttoned the neck of his jumper which had been torn open in the fight and took his cap which some one handed to him.

"Load him aboard the twenty-seven," he directed. "I'll take him to Valhalla."

Cunningham looked incredulous.

"You're crazy!" he declared. "You can't get through in a million years."

Malone's brows drew down.

"I can and I will, me and the twenty-seven. Do I have to carry him alone to the cab?"

The doctor broke in.

"By all means let him try," he urged. "Otherwise the man will die. I'll go too, if the engineer will let me."

Danny nodded, then threw open the door and started toward the juice hog which had been patiently awaiting his return. The blizzard shrieked in ghoulish glee, tossing the great snowflakes in wild abandon in its mad dance through the mountains. He climbed into the cab, and glanced over everything to see that it was right. And soon they brought the unconscious form of Burke, which they bolstered with pillows from the sleeping cars.

Hadley, the helper or "fireman" of the twenty-seven, took his place; the doctor seated himself close to Burke, where he could watch over the injured man and then with a mild grunt the twenty-seven obediently moved out of the side-track, whose switch had been opened by Cunningham himself.

SILENTLY, except for the purr of her motors, the twenty-seven rolled up the grade toward Valhalla. So far it was easy; the real climb had not begun; the first snow-filled cut was more than a mile distant. Yet they were running almost blindly. So thickly were the flakes falling that the strong ray from the hog's big headlight scarcely penetrated the opaque curtain of white that seemed to unreel endlessly before them. A minute, two minutes passed; then Danny spoke.

"We're comin' to the first cut now," he said. "Hold on to him and yerself, because I'm goin' to ram it."

As he spoke, he moved the controller handle and the motors responded with a new note. The swaying of the bulky machine grew more pronounced. There was a slight shock, and then, whoosh! they were into it!

It was as if one buried his head inside a feather tick. The snow packed solidly against the windows of the cab, until Danny could see nothing. The pressure increased; the twenty-seven began to slow down. Danny fed her more juice, and her octuple motors snarled as if in rage at the white obstacle. They growled and groaned and then the juice hog suddenly lurched ahead—free. They were through!

Danny patted the controller handle fondly and slowed her down a bit, for she was now roaring along at top speed.

"Good old girl!" he praised. "I knew ye'd do it. There's but one cut worse than that between here and Valhalla."

And the twenty-seven, as if encouraged

by the words of her master, took hold of things with a new zeal. No sooner did a high bank of snow appear than Danny touched her gently with the whip of the controller and she buried her nose in it, thrust ahead by the force of the torrent miles away in the mountains, whose strength was transmitted to the juice hog through a single strand of copper.

Danny, all engineer now, grinned at the physician.

"Doc, there's never another like her in the world," he boasted. "She'll smash her way through anything short of old Saddle Mountain itself."

The medical man replied soberly—

"Pray Heaven you may be right."

And Danny, suddenly recalled to the situation by the words, turned to peer earnestly through the cab window.

Valhalla was a matter of scarcely a mile and a half now. Just ahead loomed the deepest gash that the Transcontinental had scored into the side of Saddle Mountain and it was this place that Danny feared worst of all. Here the real strength of the twenty-seven, her ability to forge ahead without spinning her wheels, would be tested. No engine the Transcontinental had on the high line had ever attempted that cut when it was banked full of wet snow.

Danny's juice hog had the advantage of ponderous weight, coupled with a smooth driving power that made the eight wheels grip the rails tenaciously, whereas the pull of a steam-engine is in reality a series of jerks that tends to make the wheels slip.

Suddenly the ground on either side of the track seemed to rise sharply. They were at the cut. Danny threw on every ounce of power he could summon with the controller and with a surprized grunt the twenty-seven shot ahead—struck something soft, yielding, that gave way before the impact, yet insidiously sought to pull the giant machine to a stop.

The hog creaked and groaned at the terrible tax upon her strength. She was fighting a battle uphill, against a force that seemed unconquerable. Up, up and over her rose the white front of her adversary, enveloping her as if to blot out in the soft and fluffy folds of a gigantic blanket this seemingly puny thing that sought to burrow through.

The juice hog's plow was literally useless now; it was solely a matter of battering through by main strength. And the cut was long, very long. By sheer weight alone she remained on the rails.

Though the controller handle was full against the pin which marked it as being wide open, Danny sought to force the locomotive to greater effort, as he felt her slowing down. He thrust hard against the controller handle, as if to push the twenty-seven through the drift by main strength, but it was a vain effort. Slower and slower she moved and then her wheels spun as she came to a full stop. And they were by no means half through. Instantly, Danny threw off the current, and overhead through the broken rifts of snow the blizzard sang as if in triumph.

Malone threw the reverse switch; then moved the controller handle. Easily the twenty-seven backed away from the white wall, as a boxer would dance out of reach of an opponent. A hundred yards backward she went, her rear plow tossing aside the remnants of the drift that had been left in her wake. Then she ground to a stop. Over went the reverse switch to "forward" once more. She moved again to the attack.

"Stand by with him!" yelled Danny to the doctor. "We're goin' to wallop it!"

Again they struck, a soft yielding impact, and once more the twenty-seven roared and fought, gaining yardage before she was brought to a halt. Backward they went once more; then another charge. And each time Danny exhorted her, begging her to do this thing for him, as a *mahout* may urge his elephant to greater effort. The doctor shielded the unconscious Burke from each shock.

"Whooroo!" chortled Danny, as they started their battering charge a fourth time. "We'll go through this time or I'm a Hindu!"

Again came the thudding muffled sound of the tremendous blow dealt at the drift, and the twenty-seven once more put forth her best effort.

But there had to be a reckoning. No machine, human or otherwise, can stand for long an overstrain; it is nature that the weakest point must give way. In the case of the twenty-seven it was three of her eight motors.

As she surged and bucked against the snow, the odor of smoldering rubber filled the cab. Danny knew what it meant; insulation had become overheated by reason

of the tremendous surge of current the motors were being called upon to carry. It was only a matter of seconds now, if he maintained that terrific demand on her strength, that some of the myriad coils of wires of her internals would either fuse or short circuit. Yet it was but a matter of seconds before the twenty-seven would be through the drift.

"Do it for me, twenty-seven," he begged, in his voice the fervor of one who sometimes believes that a giant machine has a heart—and ears. "The best brawn of ye, now!"

And it seemed as if the twenty-seven's motors growled acquiescence. On, on they went, the great hog battling as if for her very life, while that same life burned her with an internal fire. She growled louder; then there was a sudden flash, and then her power suddenly diminished. And with that flash it seemed to Danny as if something twanged inside his breast like a plucked violin string. Her weakest motors had burned out!

But of her own momentum—the very weight of her—she went on. Praise God they were through!

Danny's breath sucked inward sharply, as he patted the controller handle.

"I knew ye'd do it, old girl," he muttered while the dried blood on his cheeks suddenly became streaked; "knew ye'd do it for me."

Then, under half-power they went limping toward the freight-yard of Valhalla, whose first switch-light began to show like a pale, green star through the driving flakes.

THE trainmen's room, with the register, just outside the superintendent's office, was crowded the next day with idle railroaders who divided their discussion between when it was likely to stop snowing and what had happened at Startup. When Danny Malone appeared in the wake of a call-boy who marched straight toward the superintendent's door, it was with difficulty that the engineer good-naturedly fought through them, for they fairly wanted to paw him over in rough friendliness. They had heard—and knew. But get through he did and presently he was seated opposite the desk of the grayed executive. The superintendent read the hearts of these old-time railroaders as easily as he read a train-sheet. Therefore, he spared the engineer embarrassment.

"Danny," said he, "when this blasted storm ends and Spring comes we're going to put another fast train on the run to the Coast and the billet is yours for the asking. Burke is the only man old enough in service likely to outbid you; the others are well satisfied with their present runs. But Burke says he wants the job to go to you; says he's going to be proud that a scrapping son-of-a-gun like yourself will be running opposite to him. What say?"

Danny looked out of the window. The north wind was pelting the snow as furiously as ever, as if daring him Danny Malone, and his juice hog to come out and do battle now. And he knew for the first time that he loved the twenty-seven, mere machine though she was. But it would be real elegant to sit in the cab of a crack flyer and know that you had right of way over everything. 'Twould be fine to drive one of those fast, new passenger engines, all dolled up and shining, but . . . .

Danny sighed, and shook his head.

"Thank ye, sor," he replied, "but I'll stay pullin' freights for a while, me and the twenty-seven."

# In Kaffir Kraals*

## Savagery Overwhelms Upina

### by Santie Sabalala

### A Remarkable Account of Actual Savage Life Told by a Zulu Who Lived It

EDITOR'S NOTE—Since white men first penetrated the Black Continent there has been a constant struggle to understand the soul and psychology of the savage—to learn something of his ideals; his secret reactions to emotions, such as suspicion, rage, hunger, ambition, love; his instincts in the jungle; his apprehension of death; his animal lust for butchery in battle; his seeming callousness to pain; his extraordinary superstitions and occult powers. . . . Hitherto the best that has been done was in H. H. Johnston's "History of a Slave," strung second-hand on tales told him by a Mohammedan converted from savagery. But here at last we have the curtain plainly lifted!

Santie Sabalala, a pure-blooded Fingo-Zulu, of the race that brought forth Lobengula and Chaka, the most terrible leaders of savages of whom we have any record, has boldly bared the soul of the savage. Santie Sabalala, who was taught by a friendly white man, gives an account that has no single hint of the influence of civilization or religion. It is pure savagery told by an extremely intelligent man who has come out of the kraals without forgetting anything that was magnificent, strange, horrible, or funny in the life of his own people.

His style of writing is unusually good. The scenes he portrays are extraordinarily vivid and terrible. And altogether we believe he contributes a remarkable chapter—more absorbing than fiction—to the history of man. While the portrayal of savage life from birth to settled maturity extends through six articles, each of these articles is a complete picture in itself. This is the sixth of the pictures.

THE *qira* or witch-doctor is commonly thought to be held in great fear by every one around. This is a mistake, for one of the most popular persons in a community is the *qira*. However, he is a person of many moods and rather vindictive. When in a good-natured mood, he is very entertaining, very versatile, is a very competent actor, and is a person who is a great student of his fellow men. He is able to understand the inner working of their minds by the simple fact that he studies himself intensely and diligently. Not only that, but he grasps at every thought that "drifts" through his mind, turning it over and over until he arrives at the right solution, even going so far as to commune with himself or pass into a trance.

Thus it is that news travels so fast in

*This is an "Off-the-Trail" Article.* *See foot-note on first contents page.*

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Africa, for *qiras* all over the continent always commune with themselves at two distinct times in the twenty-four-hour day—at early midday when the sun is at its highest meridian point, when everything alive is hardly moving because of the terrific noonday sun, and the silent period just at sundown, when the whole living world seems to have died. It is then that they *vula* their minds to receive impressions of the happenings of the day.

The individual *qira* informs two or three persons that an event has happened in a certain portion of the country, hundreds and sometimes, in a tribe unrelated to his own, a thousand miles or so away. The persons so informed by him hurry off to inform different friends of their news—and it spreads like wild fire. Months and months later the story of the disaster, calamity, or whatever the nature of the incident, is related by foot-sore wayfarers, who may have been involved or who have been witnesses of the calamity, and thereby confirm the *qira's* "mind-sighting" and give him more power over the whole of the community and the tribe, not to mention the respect and fear which it inspires in the *inkosi*. Thus it comes about that the *qira* is in every sense of the word "the power behind the throne." He, however, has quite a few personal spites, and vents his feelings in different ways.

In the *nykas* that had passed Upina's domestic household had increased. Though he still had only two *abafazi*, yet he had four *abantwana* by his second one. From his first *umfazi* an interesting family event was expected at this time, and Upina went about with a hungry light in his eyes and a half smile on his lips. A few days later, as if trying to make up for the lack of attention that he had paid Malanga the stork left *ama wele* behind him.

These two pinky-pink brown babies' arrival caused a great diversion of opinion, not so much that they were *ama wele*, but because they were *ntombi ne nkwenkwe* or boy and girl. When it became known, heads were shaken and prophecies uttered to the effect that "*omye kuko vyaku fa*—one of them will die." Among these pessimistic prophets was Upina's second wife, who had been given to him as a reward for his valor in the first raid he had taken part in.

The feeling between the two *abafazi* had not improved, as both were in a constant state of quarrelsome peacefulness, even though the *inkosi's umfazi wase ku mene*—the right-hand or first wife of the king—whose name was "No Ncumayo" (the smile—which gave a direct index to her character) and who was the head *umfazi* of a household comprising twenty-four other *abafazi*—had tried to better the situation. She had experienced the same feeling as Upina when the *inkosi* had brought back the *umfazi osi bina* many many *nyaka* ago. With her depth of understanding and kindliness, she had shown Malanga a way to close the breach between her and the other woman, but Malanga's heart was embittered against the other *umfazi* and the kindly intentioned words had no effect on her.

The usual procedure was gone through and the two babies had to suffer the same inflictions of the body with the attendant pain. After the finger-chopping, a week or so later, the *ntombi* (girl) became *yafa;* it developed a croupy cough and the little right arm began to swell. The little boy brother, with the strange inexplicableness of twins, thrived and was in the best of health; but as the days went swiftly by the little sister grew worse and worse.

The *qira's umfazi* came two or three times but did not seem to do the child any good. In desperation the mother asked that the *qira* himself come and visit the child. A messenger was sent to his home and informed the *qira* that he was asked to visit an *um tana ofayo*. In no mean terms he informed the messenger that he visited no children. The messenger went back and told Malanga what the *qira* had said.

Malanga appealed to Upina to go to the *inkosi* and have the *qira* come and visit the infant by royal mandate. Upina refused, but Malanga pleaded with him all through the night, and by morning she had a promise from him that he would see the *inkosi* early in the morning of that day. He stepped out of Malanga's hut on his way to see the *inkosi*. Half way there, he met his second *umfazi* who asked him—

"*U ya pina u nxmile nje?*"

"*Ndi yaku mbana inkosi ngom tana ofaya.*—To see the king about the sick child," he replied.

"*Nge qira?*"

"*Ewe.*"

"*Yo! Aba ntawana mbam mbe mbe nga funi qira.*—Pooh! My children never needed

the witch-doctor," the second wife sneered. Upina faltered, the woman watched him keenly. He caught her look and pulled himself together.

"*Hamba u yoku fa, sukuapa.*—Go and kill yourself; get away from here," he thundered at her. She hastily left him, and he went his way to the *inkosi's* hut. Arrived there, he made a knocking noise.

"*Mgu mbani?*—Who is there?" a voice inside questioned.

"*Ndim.*—I."

"*I gamo lako?*—Your name?"

"*Oka Pina.*—Upina."

"*Ngena.*—Enter."

Upina stooped low as he entered; he found the *inkosi* eating some cold *inyama.* He squatted down on the *inkosi's* left side near the door, this being native custom, for no one goes into the fireside unless invited to do so by the owner of the hut.

"*Yi ntoni?*" The *inkosi* questioned after he had taken a dozen big bites of his *inyama.*

"*Ndi fun qira umtama wam uya gula.*—I want the witch-doctor. My child is desperately ill," he replied.

"*Inkano zako zi ngapi?*—How much cattle have you got?"

"*Ama shumi ma ne nesi bozo.*—Forty-eight."

"*Ndi funa ishumi nesi hlann.*—I want fifteen."

"*Ze zako.*—They are yours."

"*Iqira laku za kusasanje.*—The doctor will be there this very morning."

"*Ndya mbulela musutu.*—I thank you, your highness." And Upina left the hut.

The *inkosi* sent a messenger to the *qira* to the effect that it was his will that he go and see the sick child at Upina's hut. The *qira* was furious on hearing that he was ordered to visit the sick child at Upina's hut, but he dared not refuse. Besides here was a chance to get back at Upina for lowering his (the *qira's*) dignity. It was *umfaza's* work to attend *abantwana,* not an *indoda's.* He dismissed the messenger, who was very glad to leave. Taking one of his fur bags with him from the cave home, the *qira* followed the messenger soon after to the kraal.

A DARK form blotted out the morning light at the door of Malanga's hut, for an instant, and then entered. It was the *qira.* He strode over to Malanga's side, and bent over a bundle that she unwrapped, which exposed to view the small squirming skeleton-like body of a baby girl. It could hardly breathe except in short gasps, one arm—the right—was turned a black-green because of the gangrene poison that had set in. The *qira* looked at the weakly squirming body intently for a long moment, and looking up at the mother uttered the dread words:

"*Lum ntana u takatiwe.*—This child is bewitched. *Puma apa si vale icango.*—Get out of here and let us have the door shut." The *nina* of the child got up and swung the little baby boy on to her back; his plump arms wrapped themselves around her neck. She stumbled her way out of the door. The *qira* followed her out and pulled the rude door shut with its rough leather hinges. Even as he did so there came a faint croupy cry from the abandoned infant inside the hut.

From another hut he got a hunting spear and with it bored a hole in the wall of the hut that contained the sick baby girl. Through this hole throughout the long, long day different members of the kraal peeped to see if the little bundle of humanity was still moving. No one dared go inside the hut even to give the ailing babe a drink of water for its parched little throat, for fear of *nkutakatwa* or being bewitched; and as it neared sunset, a dozen eyes looking through the dozens of holes bored since morning informed the multitude of people that had gathered because of a natural and morbid curiosity, that the infant moved no more.

The hut was therefore set afire, without any one going to see if the babe was really dead. No hut in which any one has died, even from natural causes, is ever allowed to stand, because the spirits will come back and worry the people living there. And now the next thing to be done was to have an *uku nuka* or smelling-out ceremony to discover who had bewitched the infant.

Malanga, leaning against a hut with the baby boy on her back, sobbed as if her heart would break as the hut with her girl baby's body was set afire. Upina watched her a moment or two and then went up to her and awkwardly tried to comfort her, and found to his dismay that tears were flowing down his cheek, for an *umxoga* never cries.

In the light of the blazing hut the faces of the people were lighted up in anticipation of the coming scene. The *qira* looked on their excitement with a satisfied smile

and then strode out of the *sango* to his cave to get ready for what was coming.

Some ostriches boomed far away, an hyena laughed, and an owl hooted; for it was night.

THE hut had burned down to its flimsy foundation. There only remained some baked mud and heaped ashes and live red embers. The night wind revealed, when it blew them to life, a dozen small fires that had been made in a circle around what had been the hut's walls. The people jostled each other as they crowded in a complete circle around the fires. Their teeth chattered with nervous anticipation for none knew who might be smelled out for having bewitched the now dead cremated infant. The crowd of people began to sing in undertones, with hair-raising monotony, the mournful bewitching song "*Ngase mlanie,*" gazing at the center of the ash heap of what once was a hut.

Upina, as father of the dead child, sent a messenger away to fetch the *qira* in order to smell out who had bewitched the child. The messenger went rather unwillingly, because it being night there were many chances he might be killed by a chance lion or even a leopard, not to mention the two *inyoka* that the *qira* had near the path leading to his *um xuma*. Nevertheless he went, and, after arriving near the *qira's* cave, he shouted loudly for him.

"*Onena qira, li kulu uya funna uzo ku nuka qira.*—O you great and wonderful doctor, you are wanted to smell out a witch."

"*Kulungile, mdi yeza.*—It is well; I am coming," a voice from out of the dark answered. No sooner did the *qira* finish speaking than the messenger stumbled toward the kraal as fast as he could in the darkness. Arriving back at the kraal, he sought out Upina and informed him that the *qira* was coming. Even as he finished speaking, a long-drawn-out cry from the far distance was heard, which froze the song on the crowd's lips, for it was the *qira* crying—

"*Ndi-yezi*—I am coming!" At different intervals the cry was heard as the voice drew nearer and nearer. From the top of one of the newly made huts, a form loomed up and in a flying leap landed in the middle of the ash heap of what had once been a hut. A cloud of ash dust flew into the air and covered every one nearby. The now high-strung crowd drew back as a noise from the center of the cloud of ashes boomed—

"*Ndi fikile vumani!*" In husky quavering voices they obeyed. The form leaped out from the center of the ashes, and hopped about in and out of the dozen fires. In the slowly settling haze of ash dust, the hopping form seemed to look like something unnatural, with the gray dust covering it, a specter from the world of horrible dreams.

When the dust had settled and the form stood revealed, it was the *qira* in full *uku nuka* dress. On top of his head was a grinning human skull with a luminous substance in the cavity where living eyes used to be. On top of the skull was the hide of a baboon or *infene*, with the two arms tied under his chin. The whole hide covered his back, the tail swaying this way and that way as he leaped about. Tied by pieces of sinew were several live poisonous snakes or *inyoka*, that he had caught in some way or other; several *ama duduana* or tarantulas crawled over him when still for a moment, or dangled about on their strings of sinew when in motion; a few scorpions; some large striped spiders; and other *grogro* he had tied about him.

Why the *inyoka* did not bite him and the tarantulas and other insects did not sting

or molest him in any way is left to some person who may venture to explain these interesting phenomena. Also he had his large fur bag. He circled the fires five times commanding the people to "*Vumani,*" or

"*Sanuku vuma.*" They watched him in a very fascinated way as he bounded over the fires and wove his hand in the air. People backed away from him when he looked at them full in the face, for his eyes had the cold lancing light that the *inyokas* have, which makes the brain ache.

After the fifth circle around, he pulled out from his fur bag four pieces of wood tied with a piece of rough hide. They had different marks cut on one side of them—one a criss-cross pattern, another a crocodile, another round marks and the last something similar to ants. He untied them and with a swift motion of his right hand he threw them on the ground. No sooner had they fallen than he darted after them, picking them up one by one and examining them closely. The crowd hushed their singing and hung on his actions. He shook his head slowly, as he finished looking at it. The assembled natives breathed once more—

"*Vumani!*" he shouted, and they obeyed. He bounded over the fires in time to the singing once again; he threw his "stones" on the ground and swiftly examined them. As he picked the third one, he turned round on the crowd menacingly, and then thundered—

"*Vumani! Vumani! Vumani! Ndi zaku li umana qira ngoku.*—I will find the witch now." The crowd went into a near frenzy as the *qira* leaped into the center of the different fires and sent the sparks flying in all directions: "*Vumani! Vumani! Vumani! VUMANI!*" he thundered at them, and they sang in a faster tone. With a graceful motion he threw the stones.

As they clattered to the ground, the music stopped as if by magic, three of the stones went in various directions. The fourth fell at some one's feet. The crowd held its breath, as the *qira* darted forward and picked up the fourth stone. He examined it closely by the firelight, and saw that it had the ant markings carved on it. With a terrible yell he pointed to the person at whose feet the stone had fallen.

"*Naku um takati wom ntana.*—Here is the person who bewitched the child."

It was Malanga, the mother of the dead child that he pointed to.

The crowd surged around her, questioning as to what manner of death she would die. Upina was among those who questioned thus, turning a deaf ear and not wanting to hear Malanga's dazed and frantic protest.

"*Asi ndim asi ndim ngum ngum ntana, wam.*—It is not I—it is not I—why, it was my child!" The crowd clamored to have her put to death instantly. Different crimes were blamed on her. Upina's second wife pushed her way through the crowd until she was face to face with Malanga and inflicted the supreme insult among native women, and that was to pull a face and say—

"*Ngoo—ngoo—*" The *qira* shouted—"*Pezani!* There was instant silence. He then gave out the manner of death that she should die: "*Ngomso nakum tata etafeni, nin inbope emtini, nim tyambe nge mbusi, nama futa, nze mi vnlele mbovane sa kum qimba.*—Tomorrow you will take her out on the *veld*, tie her to a tree and smear her all over first with honey then with fat, and lay a trail of honey to an ant-hill, break it open, and they will eat her up. This," he added, "is what the stone tells me, for the ant-marked side turned up."

THE crowd surged and eddied about like water around a rock. Malanga was put into a hut by herself until the morrow, the door being guarded by five or six *abaana*. The dawn came swiftly. Several *amadoda* set out to find some *mbusi*. Shortly after that Malanga was taken out of the hut and started on her journey to a point agreed upon by the *amadoda* where she was to be left to be eaten by *mbovane*. The children of the kraal jeered at her, and their parents and elders encouraged them, for to the native mind there is nothing more awful than to have a *qira* among them, even as a leper is feared in civilization.

As they went along, different thoughts were expressed as to how it would feel when a foot had been half eaten. At last they arrived at the appointed place. The *ama doda* with the *mbusi* were there. The tree was an *umga*, or thorn-tree. The branches overhead were broken off, and the bark torn off. As this was being done, Malanga was having her whole body smeared with *mbusi* and *mafuta*. Her baby son was taken off her back and she was not even allowed to nurse him. When the smearing was over, she was tied to the tree with *ntambos* and a trail was laid from the foot of the tree to an ant-hill, which

was about fourteen feet high and ten in circumference at the bottom and five at the top.

In the ant-hill there lived tens of millions of these ants. First the top of the ant-hill was broken off in a manner so it fell near where the ants would find the trail of *mbusi* and *mafuta*. Then the second portion lower down was broken. The ants were enraged, and in searching about for their tormentors, they discovered the trail. There were the first half-dozen who informed a dozen more, and then more came until there were three hundred, then a thousand, then ten thousand. They ate up the trail of honey and fat, even as fire runs along a trail of gunpowder. They came to the foot of the tree and discovered the smearing of the delicious stuff with even meat. There were millions and millions of them now they swarmed all over Malanga's body into her ears, nose, and mouth, drowning and smothering her screams.

When the sun set in the evening all that had once been a living mortal was a heap of bleaching bones and a grinning skull—that and nothing more.

# Snappy's Promotion

## by Lloyd Kohler

*Author of "Snarky's Alki Party."*

"SNAPPY" HASKELL, coxswain in the seaman guard division of the armored cruiser *Wichita* and corporal of the guard on watch, carefully closed each steel, electrically controlled, water-tight door behind him as he slowly made his way forward through the starboard ammunition passageway. He had already closed three of the six water-tight doors behind him; there were three more between him and his next sentry whose post was at the bottom of the ladder which led from the chief petty officer's quarters to the ammunition passageways. Here in the midships compartment of the starboard passageway he paused and meditated.

Snappy was in no hurry. In reality there was no need to hurry. He had just relieved the corporal of the guard of the last dog watch a few minutes before; there were four long and wearisome hours before him and his men until the sleepy-eyed midnight watch relief would be "broken out" to relieve them. Then, too, there was almost the whole of a long, monotonous and sultry thirty minutes in which to make the remainder of his round and his first half-hourly report to the officer of the deck. So why hurry? Snappy leaned heavily against the white bulkhead and smiled musingly.

"The devil must have the controlling interest in these ammunition passageways tonight," he meditated thoughtfully. "Not one out of every five blowers below decks on this battle-wagon is workin'—Death Valley ain't got nothin' on this tunnel for heat. It's so blasted hot that every man in the ship's company is sprawled out on the top decks tonight. I ought to get on top side myself, but if I did I'd have to keep movin', and the only way a man can move on top side tonight is to walk on some poor bird's face or kick out his ribs."

He shook his head suddenly, and with an effort forced his eyes wide open.

"Holy sea-hogs!" he ejaculated, as he daubed at his eyes with the back of his hand. "A man can fall to sleep here standing on his feet. It's as hot and still as Sahara, and not a blower goin'. No wonder I have to wake a sentry or two on every round. They can't stay awake—it's impossible. Sleepin' on post may be a serious offense, time of war and all that, but I wouldn't put a man on report for something I'd be sure to do myself.

"It's a different matter when a sentry on the top side is caught nappin'—deserves to be court-martialed. But down in this hole, with no blowers workin', it's another story. I'll wager that even the skipper of this tub couldn't keep his eyes open down here for four hours tonight."

As he meditated Snappy's eyes roved down to the big .38 Navy Colt that hung heavily from the holster at his side. Suddenly his eyes twinkled and his right hand sought the butt of the revolver. He glanced casually at the steel, water-tight doors at either end of the compartment and smiled. The doors were closed, and when closed were as perfectly sound-proof as water-tight.

"Could have a gun battle down here in one of these compartments and there wouldn't be a sound of it on deck, or in the next compartment for that matter," he mused. "The corporal of the guard can always keep awake pretty easily—have a little target practise all by his lonesome if he wants to and nobody's ever the wiser. Guess I might's well do a little practisin' tonight."

He pulled the long-barreled revolver from its holster and leveled it steadily on a white rivet head at the farthest end of the compartment. The next instant a deafening report burst asunder the stuffy stillness of the little compartment, echoing and re-echoing between the white steel walls; all this followed almost instantly by the whizz—uncomfortably close to the gunman's head—of the glancing bullet, which, fettered by the steel walls, seemed intent on imitating the maneuvers of a boomerang. Snappy smiled grimly as he noted the telltale mark of the bullet—not a fine exhibition of marksmanship.

"Pretty bum shot," he commented, and raised the smoking gun again.

Another crash, another whizz—but this time the improvement over the first shot was easily apparent. Snappy smiled approvingly, raised the revolver slowly and fired again. This time the white head of the rivet turned a pinkish-red as the bits of white paint chips flew in a dozen directions exposing the homely under-coating of red lead.

"There," commented the satisfied Snappy "now I'm ready to quit." He chuckled musingly. "If the skipper knew that Mosquito Slade and I have been holdin' target practice down here for the last two months he'd just naturally blow up—string us to the yard-arm if he dared. Target practice for the night is over—guess I'd better be gettin' back to top side. The junior officer of the deck will probably be pokin' along through here in a few minutes."

Five minutes later, after having inspected the last four sentry posts, Snappy puffed up the forward, starboard ladder from the gun-deck to the forecastle. The evening was beastly hot, but on the forecastle a slight breeze brushed across the bow from the north-east. He noted, almost instinctively, that the sea was calm and placid, that not even the ghost of a ripple marred the surface.

Although it was already quite dark—and would have been much darker except for a rind of a half-moon that appeared at intervals between rifts in the film-like, drifting clouds—not a trace of a light of any kind could be seen from the great, shadowy cruiser, unless, perhaps, the glowing ends of an occasional cigaret, cautiously palmed in the hands of a few of the more daring members of the groups of gossiping gobs, could be called a light.

There was just reason for caution when secretly partaking of an evening smoke on the upper decks of a war vessel in those exacting war days; and although the gobs persisted in the furtive passing of butts on the top-side after sundown, even on the darkest nights and in the most dangerous waters, it was done always at the risk of a sharp reprimand, or possibly in the face of a court-martial.

FOR a few moments Snappy stood at the top of the ladder, fingering the butt of the revolver that hung at his side and noting, among other things, the little groups of gossiping men. It was

rather unusual at this hour—these little groups of talking men—but he attributed it to the sultry evening and the accompanying restlessness of the crew.

If he had been a trifle nearer any one of the little groups he could not have helped but notice that their voices were a trifle excited and that each face bore a puzzled expression. As it was he merely noted the groups, dismissed them from his thoughts as not being worth investigating or even a second thought, and proceeded on slowly toward the bridge to make his first half-hourly report to the officer of the deck. He had taken but a few steps however when Mr. Williams, the gunnery officer, brushed hurriedly by him, and then as quickly stopped, turned abruptly on his heel and demanded sharply.

"Are you the corporal of the guard on watch now?"

Snappy pulled himself to attention stiffly and saluted wonderingly.

"Aye, aye, sir," he admitted.

"Where did you just come from, Snappy—the passageway?" The gunnery officer put the question almost accusingly.

"Aye, aye, sir—I did."

"Let me inspect your gun, corporal of the guard."

The demand of the gunnery officer came as a sudden shock—so surprizing that he started innocently—as Snappy remembered the three empty cartridges which had not been removed or replaced, and even before he could move the officer lurched forward suddenly and jerked the tell-tale gun from its holster.

Snappy felt a peculiar sensation as of something racing up and down the middle of his back as the officer felt the long barrel appraisingly with his left hand, and then deliberately extracted the powder-blackened cartridges, three of which were empties, and held the damning evidence in the palm of his hand before Snappy's eyes.

"The barrel's still warm, boy," he said accusingly. "You admit that you just now came from the ammunition passageways. Perhaps you didn't know that Mr. Whiting, the junior officer of the deck, was shot in the head—not seriously, thank God—five minutes ago in the same passageways. Your gun is still warm when you come up on deck from the passageways, and contains three empties in the cylinder. It looks bad for you, boy—bad!"

Snappy stood motionless, aghast as the terrible realization of the significance of the facts dawned upon him. The evidence was so very complete—so damning. Before he could summon even a word in defense he became vaguely aware of more damning evidence from the mouth of the officer—words that he scarcely understood and yet, paradoxically, which he understood all too well.

"—and so we asked Mr. Whiting as soon as he came to if he were aware that he might have an enemy aboard this ship. He said that he could not recall any man who might be disposed to 'do away' with him. But he stated that he did remember some heated words with a certain enlisted man about two weeks ago, and then, when we asked him to give that man's name, he named you. I didn't know you were on watch a few minutes ago when he told us that and I began looking for you. I think I can see it all pretty clearly now."

Snappy merely stared blankly while the officer eyed him coldly, waiting for an answer. But the corporal of the guard was too amazed and surprized to attempt even a semblance of an explanation. Then suddenly, the gunnery officer turned expectantly and nodded as Dinny Hard, the master-at-arms, came up hurriedly; then he turned abruptly back to Snappy.

"Well, coxswain," he said almost sneeringly, "I just asked you if you had any differences with Mr. Whiting two weeks ago. Did you?"

"Well—yes, sir—words, but——"

He had found his voice but there was nothing apparently that could be said.

"That will do, coxswain. We don't need any explanations now. Plenty of time for all that later. The capt'n merely gave me orders to get the right man—said to let him think the whole affair over tonight in the brig. Master-at-arms," he nodded to Hard, "lock this man up tonight—Do so at once. And, remember, he will get no hammock tonight, Capt'n's orders; he wants to give this man lots of time to think—not sleep."

The master-at-arms nodded understandingly, grasped Snappy by the arm and led him below decks forward to the brig. Then, not until the steel door had swung shut and the key turned in the big padlock outside with the wondering Snappy safely within, did the master-at-arms attempt an

explanation or even an enlightening word.

"Hope you'll come out of this scrape all right, Snappy—but you might have done a better job of it," he laughed sympathetically. "You're about the last man on board this tub that I thought I'd have to lock up when they told me that somebody plugged Whiting. Well, Snappy," he added mischievously, "good luck—but you deserve bread and water in your craw and a steel deck to cork off on the rest of your days if you couldn't do a better job killin' a man than that."

"Well, Dinny, I'm tellin' you straight—I didn't shoot that bird."

A puzzled expression came over Dinny's face.

"I know it, Snappy," he said, "but the evidence—all the facts—point your way. It leaves you in a pretty bad light. Well, boy," he said, as he started to leave, "I'd better be gettin' on now. If certain persons saw me here very long at a time I might have to explain why I was entertaining a prisoner. I'm goin' to keep my lamps trimmed, Snappy, and if I hear any more about this shootin' I'll let you know."

Snappy smiled grimly as the footsteps of the redoubtable master-at-arms, plugging slowly up the ladder, reached his ears. Then he walked over to the farthest corner of the brig and sat down on the steel deck to think. But although he rummaged his mind for some kind of explanation he could not figure the thing out. Of course, it was true that he had been shooting in the ammunition passageways. That was a serious offense in itself—he knew that only too well. But he was sure that no one could have possibly heard those three shots when both of the water-tight doors had been closed.

It was the gunnery officer's inspection of the gun—the three empty cartridges, the warm barrel—that had cinched his fate. If Mr. Whiting had been shot in the passageways, how could it have been by one of his bullets? He knew that it could not unless one of them had somehow pierced the steel bulk-head, which, of course, was an impossibility.

It puzzled him and he cursed his foolhardiness for ever shooting in the passageways, and then, as he remembered, cursed the man who was indirectly responsible for it. He recalled that it was the gunner's mate, "Mosquito" Slade, who had started these little revolver practices in the passageways.

MOSQUITO who was the gunner's mate on watch that night two months before, had met Snappy, who was the corporal of the guard on watch, in the port passageway. It was after they had talked several minutes and discussed the sound-proof character of the water-tight doors that Mosquito suggested a private revolver match.

At first Snappy had refused, but after Mosquito assured him that he had been doing it successfully and "gettin' away with it," Snappy hesitated no longer. The temptation was too great. Both petty officers were expert revolver shots and during the night watches of the weeks that followed they matched their skill at every available opportunity. Nor did they worry over the ammunition they were shooting away so freely, for Mosquito, as gunner's mate, had free access to the vast magazines and he kept Snappy always well supplied. In fact Snappy had intended to go directly to his locker to replace the empty cartridges as soon as he had made his report to the officer of the deck. But being intercepted by the gunnery officer spoiled all that.

Snappy shook his head discouragedly and was in the act of giving up the puzzling situation in despair when he heard keys rattling in the lock of his cell door, and the next moment, as the heavy door swung open, Dinny Hard, the master-at-arms, stepped inside quickly and closed the door behind him.

"Well, Snappy," he said abruptly, "I was just talking to the gunnery officer and he gave me the story that Whiting told when he came to. Whiting, you know, was the junior officer of the deck and was making his rounds—said he was going through the port ammunition passageway when the bullet connected up with him. It seems that he had just pulled the switch and the electrically-driven door was just beginning to open when the shot struck him.

He fell forward through the opening door and although dazed he caught a glimpse of the back of the disappearing fellow that fired the shot as he was going through the opposite water-tight door. He noticed, however, that the man wore a black belt

and holster—so it's pretty certain that the man who fired the shot was either the corporal of the guard on watch or the gunner's mate on watch, and—well—"

"So they picked me," supplied Snappy.

"Somebody—one of the officers—remembered the disagreement that Whiting had with you a few weeks ago. Then, Mr. Mette of the seaman guard division told them that you were on watch; so the gunnery officer started out to investigate. The fact that the barrel of your revolver was still dirty and warm, and that the cylinder contained three empty cartridges proves beyond a doubt—so they say—that you fired the shot."

The master-at-arms looked steadily at Snappy as though expecting him to speak, but he was too wrapped up in his thoughts even to have noticed that Dinny had quit talking.

"Well, Snappy, I'm goin' back on deck now and I'll keep my ears and eyes open Maybe I'll have something to tell you when I come back."

He closed the heavy door quietly and the keys again rattled in the door, but it was not until his feet could be heard on the steel ladder as he climbed to the gun-deck that Snappy realized that he had gone.

"Dinny's a brick, if he is a 'Jimmy-Legs'," he meditated thoughtfully. "There's not many fellows who would take as much interest in me and this affair—especially when everything points in the same direction—toward me."

For a long time he sat motionless, his eyes staring blindly at the hundreds of little round holes in the steel door of his cell, the skin across his forehead tightening and expanding at intervals. Finally, through force of habit, he put his thoughts into words, as though framing a truth—and it was a truth—in the form of an alibi.

"Now I was in the middle compartment of the *starboard* ammunition passageway when I shot at that rivet head. Dinny said that Mr. Whiting was shot while going through the *port* ammunition passageway. That ought to let me out even if everything else is against me."

Gradually, however, his face fell.

"But—sufferin' barnacles—who would believe me? That I was in the *starboard* ammunition passageway."

A moment later with the slightest trace of moisture in his discouraged gray eyes, he dropped over on his side on the steel deck and pillowed his head upon his arm. If his superiors had thought to diminish his chances of sleep and rest by refusing him a hammock they were doomed to disappointment, for fifteen minutes later he was snoring heavily, quite unaware of the crude nature of his bed, the chill of the cold, steel deck, or the cruelty of the hard rivet heads which dug mercilessly into his ribs.

A DULL, heavy, thunderous explosion, accompanied by a rending and tearing of metal and a terrific shock that threw him bodily across the length of the cell, brought the dazed Snappy back to consciousness. He sat up, dazedly, and rubbed his sleep-burdened eyes awkwardly with the back of his hands. At the same time he became aware of a fierce throbbing in his head and of something warm and liquid trickling down the sides of his face. As he brought his hands, plastered with blood, down from his face, his eyes fell upon the sharp, blood-covered angle-iron at the bottom of the cell door, and he realized that the concussion had thrown him diagonally across the cell and deposited him, head foremost, upon the sharp angle-iron.

"Well," he puffed breathlessly, as he investigated the rugged rent in the top of his head, "it don't seem to be so bad, but I didn't think that I'd be called upon to paint this box-stall red. I wonder——"

He did not finish the sentence. A united and insistent whining of bugles sounding the call to abandon ship reached his ears. As he peered through the little round holes in the heavy door that held him captive he saw white-uniformed chief petty officers racing by from their living quarters, apparently to their respective divisions.

"Something must have hit something," he mused grimly. Again his hand found its way unconsciously to the aching wound in his scalp. "And something sure did hit me," he concluded seriously.

Suddenly he noticed that something was wrong; that the steel deck of his cell was no longer seemingly on a level with the universe. Either his eyes were playing queer pranks or the deck listed decidedly to the starboard. He had almost concluded that his eyes did not deceive him and that the deck was actually listed slightly when another terrific explosion, more tremendous

than the first, lifted him bodily in the air and slammed him as suddenly on his belly to the deck.

For what was to him an indefinite length of time—probably not over a few short minutes—he lay still, stunned and gasping for his breath, half expecting another explosion, but as none came he rolled over on his side slowly, as though trying to ascertain the number of broken bones in his body, and then, apparently fully satisfied that there were none, gradually pulled himself to his feet. As he did so he discovered that the list of the deck was three times as great as after the first explosion, not only to the starboard but also aft from where the last explosion had evidently come.

"That last explosion must have been the after-powder magazine. That was a corker of a shock. If they were goin' to abandon ship before the last explosion they better speed up——"

The heavy boom of a six-inch gun cut his sentence abruptly; then another followed quickly; and then another. He decided that the six-inch battery must have sighted the enemy, or, if not, that they were firing at will to signal their distress to another vessel. He concluded from the extreme list of the deck that it must be the port six-inch battery that was doing the firing. Then, as no one appeared to open the steel barrier that held him as the seconds flew into minutes, the peril of his own predicament began to grip him. It had not occurred to him before.

"Holy mackerel!" he ejaculated, his face paling perceptibly. "Dinny ought to be pokin' down this way and turn me out of this hell-hole if the ship is really in danger. If he wouldn't I'd sure be in a rat trap."

His face grimaced sharply.

"What if he forgot—in all the excitement?"

For a moment he pondered over this phase of the situation, and then, with a short mirthless laugh, forced it from his mind.

"Of course, he wouldn't forget," he assured himself. "Why, the prisoners are naturally the first thing in the mind of a good master-at-arms at all times. It comes natural to 'em."

He turned his head quickly and put an ear against the holes in the steel door as a gurgling, washing sound of rushing water came distinctly from somewhere abaft the brig. His heart seemed to almost pause in the important job of beating, so intently did he listen to that ominous warning, his face turning another shade paler as the sound grew louder.

"My ——!" he exclaimed. "There's an ocean of water breakin' through somewhere. Why don't Dinny come?"

Snappy's eyes quickly sought the deck at his feet as a flood of water rushed through the narrow space between the bottom of the door and the deck. He watched it in awe, helplessly waiting, until it began spurting through the first row of air holes, six inches from the deck, and then, cupping his hands before his mouth, shouted frantically again and again. But no one answered or came to his assistance; there was no sound but the rushing, churning sound of water. The water rose rapidly to the first foot mark and then to his knees, and still he shouted, now hoarsely and plaintively, and beat his knuckles frantically against the steel barrier that held him so securely.

Then he lunged with all the desperate strength of his body, time after time throwing his shoulders savagely against the steel, padlocked door. In exhaustion he finally quit shouting and listened fearfully to the increasing rumbling of the waters and the echoes of his shouts which still hung in the air and played mockingly in his ears, suggesting that even sound waves could not escape those dread walls, but traveled to and fro battering feebly against them—echoing and re-echoing.

WITH the water already around his thighs Snappy was too good a seaman not to foresee the inevitable end, but, still hoping, he looked about the narrow cell for a catch hold to pull himself a little higher when the water should reach his chin. There was nothing of the kind to stay the unavoidable death for even a little longer, and with a final despairing effort he shouted again.

This time he thought he heard an answer to his cry, and taking fresh courage he yelled again and kicked upon the door. He rejoiced—yes, he even felt his heart bound upward—as a sound of splashing could be heard distinctly just beyond the cell door and the form of a man came into view.

"Just hold your canary birds a little longer," the man shouted encouragingly.

"Hang tight a bit now, shipmate, and out you'll come."

Snappy, with his eye to one of the small, round holes, followed the man's every movement as he splashed about in the hip-deep water, evidently looking for something heavy enough to smash the lock.

"Why, it's Mosquito," he exclaimed surprizedly as the man's face came into view. "Of all things—I thought it was Dinny, the Jimmy-Legs."

A moment later Mosquito was back with an ax which he luckily located resting on the top of the locker which belonged to the chief carpenter's mate. Two well-directed blows parted the heavy lock and the next instant the corporal of the guard and the gunner's mate stood face to face in the waist-deep water.

"Speed 'er up and follow me, Snappy," he advised, as he struck out determinedly toward the nearest ladder leading to the gun-deck. "Almost everybody who wasn't killed outright by the two explosions was already in the boats or in the water when I climbed back aboard—Yuh see, I was already in a life-boat. I asked the men in the boat if they seen anything of you. None of 'em had, but several said that Dinny, the Jimmy-Legs, was killed in the first explosion—the shifting of the boat-deck's load of lumber ended him along with a lot of others."

The gunner's mate was half swimming, half walking, struggling through the rushing water with the determined Snappy close at his heels, but never once did he slacken his speed or his words.

"I couldn't bear to think of you drowning like a rat down there, Snap, so I beat it back aboard—up a sea-ladder. Some of those birds tried to hold me back—even the skipper yelled at me to come back, but I kept goin'. Reckon I'll hear about it for disobeyin' orders, but I—well—I knew that if Dinny was killed in the first explosion that you was still down there."

Once safe on the ladder he turned and smiled at the pale-faced corporal of the guard who clambered up at his heels.

"I didn't get to you a minute too soon, eh, Snappy? Take a look—quick."

They turned and looked back. The water was already surging within a few inches of the top of the brig door. Snappy shuddered. He had the true seaman's dread of death by drowning. Mosquito voiced the thought in the mind of both—"like a rat in a rain barrel"—as they scrambled on to the top of the ladder and along the port side of the gun-deck.

The water was already pouring into the starboard six-inch gun ports where the gun crews had long before deserted their dangerous posts. Both men kept close to the port bulkhead, scurrying along with the last of the port six-inch batteries' crews who had stood by their guns to the last. Gaining the deck of the port gallery, they stopped momentarily to ascertain the safest means of reaching the water.

The monster cruiser was by this time lying fairly on its starboard side, and the twenty or more men remaining on the sinking vessel were perched perilously upon the sharp ridge formed by the upper decks of the ship and the port side of the hull. Some of them were crawling toward the water on the port side of the hull, and more followed their daring example as the decks of the ship presented a more and more perpendicular aspect as the moments flew by.

Some of the remaining men were jumping clear into the sea, but as the cruiser turned slowly like a monster dying fish, this became almost a physical impossibility. Several struck their heads on the armor-belt in attempting to jump clear, crushing their skulls or breaking their necks. The more cautious, Snappy included, lay upon their backs or bellies and slid to the sea, feet first, like playing beavers.

Snappy shook the water from his eyes and face as his head appeared above the surface, and looked about quickly, sizing up the situation. He noticed that several commissioned officers were in the water near him, organizing the men in the water and shouting advice and instructions to the few still on board.

Then he tried to locate the courageous Mosquito, but the gunner's mate was nowhere in sight; then he swam about in a circle endeavoring to locate a floating spar or mess table to buoy him up until rescuers should appear, but everything of the kind was in use. He realized that he was growing weaker because of loss of blood from the wound in his head, and that in this condition he could not stay afloat long without something to aid him.

On his right a mess table was surrounded by three swimming men—there was no chance for another there. A few feet away

an officer who had commandeered a ladder was shouting instructions to a Filipino mess-attendant who seemed to fear to make the one effort that night save him.

Suddenly, just above him, he heard a shout of warning, and the next instant a large oblong hatch-grating struck the water a few feet from his head, and then, skipping on the water like a great, flat stone, it struck a white-uniformed officer fairly in the back of the head. The man gave a horrible groan, turned over, and started to sink.

Snappy reached the sinking man with two powerful strokes, caught him in the hair with his left hand, and keeping the blood-stained face above the water, swam desperately toward the wooden grating. With an effort he got the officer on the grating and swam, pushing it before him, as far from the sinking vessel as his weakened condition would permit, and then, pulling himself up on the grate with the other man, swooned from his loss of blood.

THE trickling of cold water in his face brought Snappy back to consciousness, and he remembered quite distinctly the terrible events of the past few hours. There was a dull sickening pain in his head, and he opened his eyes with difficulty. One glance of his experienced eyes showed him that he was lying on a hammock mattress which was spread on the quarter-deck of an American destroyer. On every side of him other wounded men were stretched upon the deck, with here and there an officer or a hospital steward bending over them.

Snappy was stretched close to the rail and the first glance to seaward awarded him only by a vast amount of floating wreckage, floating ditty-boxes, mess-tables, wooden hatch-grates, spars, and miscellaneous pieces of lumber of varying sizes and shapes; but the great cruiser—their home—had passed below the waves and from the sight of men forever.

Something stirred at his shoulders and he turned his head slowly, painfully. What he saw was a white-uniformed officer standing at his head, peering down kindly into his pale face. Indeed, it was more than just an ordinary officer of the line—it was the skipper himself. Already he was speaking, and Snappy closed his eyes wonderingly.

"Lie still, Snappy—just take it easy for awhile," he was saying. "You've got a bad cut in your head—not dangerous, but painful."

Snappy eyes opened. He stared unbelievingly. Why, the old man must be plumb nutty. There he was—forgetting all distinctions of naval caste, actually on agreeable, even human, terms with an enlisted man. It was absolutely too much for one time, and Snappy began to file the puzzling incident away for future reference, and a clearer mind. It would all make a first-rate yarn to spin to a life-boat's crew during some long, monotonous watch. A question from the skipper, point-blank, snapped him out of the dream.

"How in thunder did you get out of the brig, Snappy? I didn't know that the master-at-arms was killed by the first explosion until it was too late to send a man back on board to try to save you. At that time it would have been sending a man to his death. Then when we saw you it was like seeing a ghost—thought you had gone down with the ship."

Snappy smiled reminiscently, and then in short, broken sentences, emphasized by an occasional wincing of the facial muscles, he told the gray-headed skipper of the ill-fated cruiser the story of his last-minute rescue by the courageous Mosquito. Throughout the narrative the skipper smiled thoughtfully, shaking his head approvingly as Snappy concluded.

"Don't you remember anything after that?—after you were in the water?"

"Well, I remember that I was pretty near all in, and that somebody heaved a big hatch grating from the ship. I guess I remember that because it barely missed me and knocked an officer coo-coo. I got him as he was goin' down, put him on the wooden grating and pushed it ahead of me until I thought we were safe from the suction of the sinkin' ship. Then I crawled on the grating on top of the officer—that's the last I remember."

"You don't remember then who the officer was?" the skipper queried.

"No, sir—I'm sorry."

"Well, coxswain, I'm not. That officer was myself."

Snappy stared doubtfully. For a time neither spoke and then Snappy queried fearfully:

"Have you seen him—Mosquito? Was he saved?

The skipper smiled.

"I saw Mosquito just before you saw me and put me on that grating. Mosquito was one of the last men to attempt to jump clear into the sea from the almost vertical deck. He made a fine jump—man alive, but that was a jump—but he struck some floating object when he hit the water and it put him out of commission.

"It looked bad for him at the time though it proved nothing serious, but Mosquito saw all the blood and thought he was going to die. I was the first man to him and he told me everything—that he was on watch in the port ammunition passage-way, holding a little private target practise, and that it was a shot from his gun that struck Mr. Whiting.

He told me that he fired that shot just as he was opening the water-tight door. He did not notice that the door at the other end of the compartment was also opening when he fired the shot—you see, the noise from the door he was opening drowned the noise of the other opening door. Evidently the bullet glanced, hitting Mr. Whiting.

"Mosquito kept on going because he did not know that Whiting had been hit. Then when he found that we had put the thing on you he decided to wait a bit longer and see how things turned out before giving himself up. I saw him going back aboard the sinking ship and ordered him back, but he kept on going. Of course, I didn't know what he was going for. So that clears you, Snappy."

Snappy smiled, but he was not convinced.

"Yes, it clears me of that—but not of the target practise in the passage-ways," he said doubtfully.

"No," the skipper replied seriously. "You should certainly be reprimanded for that. But you won't be for it was only a thoughtless act, and I'd be a queerly constituted person if I allowed you to be punished for that after saving my life. I owe you a good bit for that, boy—so that lets you out clear."

For a time Snappy did not speak. Instead his thoughtful eyes sought the horizon.

"Captain," he said finally, "the only thing that worries me is to think of Mosquito doing time for the thing I've been cleared of—you know, after what he did for me."

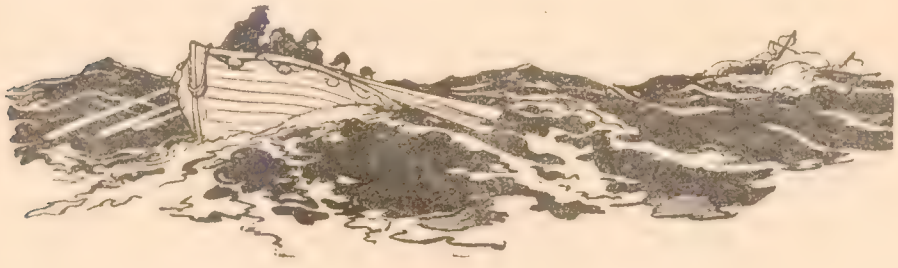
The captain's deep blue eyes twinkled kindly—understandingly.

"Never mind that, Snappy. Mosquito won't be required to do time either—not this time. We know now that it was not an intentional shooting. Mr. Whiting was not hurt seriously and is coming along fine, and I can't overlook the fact that if Mosquito hadn't saved you that you wouldn't have been on hand to save me."

Snappy was so happy that he sat upright, unmindful of the sharp pains through the head that it caused him.

"Thank you, sir," he said earnestly. "I'll——"

"Don't thank me, boy," the skipper cut in heartily. "I'm the man that should do the thanking and more—and I will. I've just ordered Mosquito's rate raised in recognition of his heroism, and I don't mean that you should be slighted. So from now on, coxswain, you're a boatswain's mate. Now you'll have a chance to do your practising with a boatswain's call instead of with a revolver."



# Powder Law

by W·C·Tuttle

## a complete novelette

*Author of "Law Rustlers," "The Sheriff of Sun-Dog," etc.*

WHEN the Evil Spirit was very young, he desired to live upon the earth. Being an Evil Spirit, the land was too fair for his abode; so he builded himself a land upon a land.

Being very young, his dwelling pleased him for a time, but like a child he soon tired of it, after which he destroyed it with a sweep of his hands. The tale is true. This place was surely made by a spirit, and would the Great Spirit build such a place as this?—*Indian Legend.*

AS PROOF of this legend they point to the Mauvaises Terres, the Bad Lands of eastern Montana; mute evidences of the one-time devil's playground. White men call it a freak of nature, this desolate region; peopled with shadow-ghosts, grotesque architecture, not made by human hands, where the blizzards of Winter howl and shriek through cave and column, and where the heat gods dance through the short Summers. Freak of nature, it may be—devil's playground, it is.

It was the Summer of 1880, nine years before Montana was admitted to the sisterhood of States; a time when the laws of God and man were but vague shadows of the future or of a forgotten past; a time when right and wrong were but an individual point of view.

History does not touch this period of the West, except to tell briefly of troubles with the Cheyenne and Sioux, who merely fought to repel the invader. But this tale is not of the Indian, but of another menace of that day, which is not mentioned in history.

SKIRTING the border of the Bad Lands came two mounted men, leading a pack-horse. The man in the lead, riding a tall gray horse, drew rein at the top of a small butte. He removed his sombrero and wiped the perspiration from his brow, with the sleeve of his shirt.

"Blaze" Carlin was a striking figure of a man, as he sat his horse with the ease attained by none except men who live their lives atop a horse. His hair was long and as black as the proverbial raven's wing, except for a strip, at least two inches wide of snow-white hair, which began at the center of his forehead and ended at the crown of his head. From this peculiarity he received his nickname.

His forehead was broad, his cheek-bones prominent, and a generous mouth smiled from beneath a high-arched nose. He was as bronzed as a savage. In fact, at first glance, one would have called him a Sioux, but there was a hint of Celtic blood in his upper lip and mouth, and his eyes, a slaty-gray, did not fit the rest of his features nor coloring. It was as if an artist had used a Sioux model; painting in an Irish smile and blue-gray eyes and finished it off by drawing a full brush of white through the center of the hair.

The other man was small and wiry,

bearded to the eyes, which were as black and luminous as jet beads. His nose was hooked, like the beak of an eagle. While Blaze Carlin was dressed in the height of cowboy fashion, this little man, "Frenchy" Ditteau, wore an old, half-fringed buckskin shirt, plaid, blanket pants and short boots. Across the fork of their saddles, both men carried Sharp's rifles.

Frenchy Ditteau rode up beside Blaze, took out a plug of tobacco and a heavy clasp-knife and began to cut a pipeful of tobacco.

"Bimeby we strike de town, eh, Blaze?"

Blaze Carlin nodded, but continued to stare ahead. He brushed his hand across his eyes and turned his head.

"I reckon so, Frenchy. This heat kinda makes things look queer and this danged country makes yuh see things what ain't; but I thought I seen seven men riding toward the sun. Maybe they was buffalo, but I don't think so."

"You got de good eye," nodded Frenchy. "I'm mak' de bet that she's not be de buffalo."

Blaze smiled at his companion. He had first met little Frenchy Ditteau in a saloon near Deadwood; a saloon filled with powder-smoke and struggling men. He had seen Frenchy empty his pistol and then fling himself headlong into the muzzle of spouting pistols, slashing with his knife and yelling like a Comanche.

The odds were sadly against Frenchy; therefore Blaze accepted part of the battle. Frenchy had been scored in several places, but Blaze managed to get him to the hitch-rack, where they got mounted and rode out of the town.

"Where yuh headed for?" Blaze had asked.

"Some place," said Frenchy vaguely. "I'm t'ink dis town she's not be friend to me and you, pardnair. Where you go?"

"Some place," grinned Blaze and they galloped out of town, headed north.

Blaze Carlin was a gambler, but an honest one. He had no visions of making a big stake. Gambling to Blaze was an obsession rather than a profession. He knew the cattle business, knew that his riding and roping ability would earn him a job in any cow-country. Money meant nothing to him except a chance to pit his judgment against other men.

He had ridden away with Frenchy Ditteau for the simple reason that he knew the town would be against him for his part in the battle and partly because he admired the heart of a man who would pit his knife against pistols. He did not ask Frenchy the reasons for the fight, because it was none of his affair, and Frenchy did not explain. It was merely an incident. Frenchy was utterly indifferent as to his destination. Blaze suggested Medora.

"Ba gosh, dat's de place!" declared Frenchy.

"How about headin' up into Montana where the new railroad is comin' through?" asked Blaze.

"We go dere sure!" exclaimed Frenchy. "I'm lak' to see de railroad."

Blaze laughed.

"Ain't you got no choice, Frenchy?"

"To go wit' you," grinned Frenchy and the partnership pact was sealed.

For miles they had skirted the Bad Lands, seeking to strike into the big cattle-ranges, but as yet they had found no signs of human habitation. Frenchy lighted his pipe and they rode on. About half a mile farther on they came to a brushy coulée, and partly hid away in the brush they could see the half-log, half-mud cabin of a squatter.

"Hittin' closer to civilization," observed Blaze pointing at the cabin.

Frenchy drew slowly at his unlighted pipe, his eyes squinted in a steady focus on some object.

"What do yuh see?" asked Blaze.

Frenchy did not reply, but spurred his horse down the edge of the coulée. Blaze, after another look, followed him, driving the pack-horse ahead of him. A trail, hammered hard by cloven hoofs, led straight down through the brush to the rear of the cabin.

Near the side of the cabin grew a stunted cottonwood tree, and hanging to a large branch by a noosed rope was the figure of a man. Blaze and Frenchy dismounted and walked around the tree. The body was tightly bound with ropes, and pinned to the breast of the dead man's shirt was a square of paper on which was crudely printed—

A WARNIN TO ALL

It was signed with a large V. Frenchy folded his arms and puffed loudly on his pipe while Blaze read it aloud.

"You spik true," nodded Frenchy. "We are close to de civilize folks, Blaze."

"That V would be for vigilantes," mused Blaze. "Did yuh ever hear of them, Frenchy?"

Frenchy shook his head.

"They're a bunch of fellers who takes the law in their own hands," explained Blaze. "When the law can't or won't do the job right, then the vigilantes steps in."

"Mm-m-m," mumbled Frenchy. "She's hang de bad-man, eh? All de time she's do no-ting to de good man?"

"I don't reckon they're supposed to," said Blaze.

"When de vigilante she's hones' man, she's only tak' away de bad-man, eh? Me, I'm mak' t'ink she's bad t'ing if de bad-man mak' himself vigilante. W'at you t'ink, Blaze?"

The crude wisdom of Frenchy had picked out the flaw of the vigilante system—a system which was efficient in bringing terror to outlawry in the old West, but which went beyond its intention and became the weapon of unscrupulous men, who used it to further their own ends.

"I reckon you're right, Frenchy," admitted Blaze, after thinking over Frenchy's words. "Maybe they won't thank us for buryin' their victim, bein' as they kinda leaves 'em hangin' around as a warnin'; but we'll take a chance."

They cut the rope. The man was well past middle-age, his hair and beard almost white. Blaze examined him closely. One of his legs lay in an unnatural position, and Blaze discovered that the man was a cripple. He examined the man's hands and got to his feet as Frenchy appeared with a shovel and a pick.

"Why you t'ink dey string him up for?" asked Frenchy. "Bad-man, you t'ink?"

"He was a cripple, Frenchy." Blaze spoke softly, as if afraid the dead man might hear. "His knee is all crooked and his hands are tied in knots from rheumatism. He couldn't neither run nor hold a gun."

Frenchy turned away and began digging. Blaze watched him for a time and then picked up the shovel.

"I'm mak' t'ink," observed Frenchy leaning on his pick, "I'm t'ink I'm mad like —— for de vigilant. Mebbe she's de law, but jus' de same ——"

"He couldn't run nor hold a gun," said Blaze.

"Me and you t'ink alike, mos' always," nodded Frenchy.

Neither of them knew anything of the burial service. The victim of the vigilantes was rolled in an old blanket and buried beside the old cottonwood tree. The interior of the cabin did not disclose the man's identity. It was crudely furnished and did not show long occupancy. There was no sign of any firearms and the food supply was low. They fastened the door and rode on.

The sun was an hour high when they reached a large stream of water flowing down a small valley. The stream was lined with willow and cottonwood, which cut a green gash through that sun-baked country. Several head of range cattle whirled out of the willows at their approach, wild as partridge.

"We're into the cow-country at last," smiled Blaze, as they rode into the willows.

Frenchy nodded. They followed a trail through the brush and drew up at the bank of the stream.

"Somebody mak' de sign," observed Frenchy, pointing at a sign on a big cottonwood, which grew near the bank.

Blaze rode in close to the tree and read the notice aloud.

**WARNIN**
**THIS LAND BELONG TO**
**BLACK MORA**
**NO BODY ALLOW HERE**

Frenchy snorted his disgust.

"Shall we move on?" asked Blaze.

"I'm mak' de wet camp today," declared Frenchy. "I'm no want Black Mora's land—I'm jus' want to camp. We stay."

"I've heard of him," said Blaze. "A man in Deadwood told me something about him. Big cattleman, I reckon. Wants to run the country."

"Mebbe de countree she's no run," grinned Frenchy, taking the swing-rope off the pack. "We tak' chance."

Both of the men owned camp-broke horses and there was no need of hopple or picket-rope. The three horses moved up the stream, cropping at the green grass, while the men prepared camp. Blaze happened to glance across the creek just in time to see a rider disappearing over a ridge. He was close enough for Blaze to see that the man was looking at their camp.

"One of Black Mora's spies," said Blaze pointing him out to Frenchy, but the man

disappeared before Frenchy could locate him.

"We'll give the horses an hour on the grass and then tie 'em up," stated Blaze. "Yuh never can tell what kind of a hornet this Mora is and we might need a horse under us real quick."

"Ba gosh, I'm prepare for de night!" Frenchy's beard and mustache seemed to fuzz out like the whiskers on an angry bobcat.

He patted his pistol butt.

"I'm hard man for mak' move, but jus' as you say, Blaze. Mebbe she's de good idea for have de horse handy, for de reason dat mebbe we have to chase dis Black Mora, eh?"

Blaze laughed, but Frenchy was serious. In anything except a fight the little Frenchman had the heart of a child, but the prospect of trouble seemed to add inches to his height and his black eyes became bead-like in their intensity.

They cooked and ate their supper and then Blaze caught the horses, tying them near camp. Blaze had been keeping a close watch across the creek, expecting trouble to come from that direction, if at all. Suddenly he heard Frenchy grunt softly. Two men had ridden in from the rear, making no sound on the soft trail, and were almost to the fire before Frenchy saw them.

One was a tall, swarthy, black-mustached person, with an arrogant expression. The other was a trifle smaller, with mouse-colored hair, one empty eye-socket and a badly scarred face. Both men carried rifles and wore pistols.

Blaze looked them over carefully. The tall man, after staring hard at Blaze, pointed at the sign, his long, bony forefinger quivering as he seemed to put his soul into the gesture.

"You see that sign?" he grunted.

"Still havin' my sight," nodded Blaze.

The man seemed shocked to think that Blaze had seen it and still disregarded its warning. His hand dropped to his side and he frowned at Blaze. Frenchy was standing near the other rider, his legs braced far apart, his unlighted pipe between his lips.

"This here land belongs to Mora," stated the tall man.

"Who is Mora?" asked Blaze easily.

"Black Mora? You don't know?"

"Nigger?" asked Frenchy.

The man turned his head and shot a withering glance at Frenchy, but Frenchy's glare was just as deadly and the man turned back to Blaze.

"You git off this land! Mora don't allow nobody here. I'll give you—" he glanced around at the meager outfit and turned back to Blaze—"I'll give yuh half-hour to git off this ranch."

Blaze rubbed his chin and considered the order.

"You work for Black Mora?" he asked.

"I shore do."

"Know him well enough to take a message to him?"

"I shore do."

"Then tell him that Blaze Carlin told him to go to ——."

"Mak' de message from Frenchy Ditteau, too," added Frenchy. "Mak' her read de same."

The tall man's eyes narrowed for an instant and his shoulder seemed to hunch. Blaze Carlin's hand crooked at the wrist and his Colt .44 split the stillness of the creek bottom. The tall man's arm swung forward, seemed to crumple at the elbow and his pistol fell to the ground.

At the first motion of the draw, Frenchy had sprung forward and upward, grasping the other man by the belt and yanking him off his horse. The man drew a gun as Frenchy tore him loose from the saddle, but the gun went spinning into the bushes.

Blaze paid no attention to Frenchy and the other man. The tall man's rifle slid to the ground, and his frightened horse backed until its rump struck a tree, which made it jerk forward, almost unseating its rider, whose arm seemed to occupy all his attention. Frenchy had flung his man to the ground and pinned his arms.

"Ba gosh, I'm hope for de good fight, but I'm mak' mistake," grunted Frenchy.

"You'll have a chance to use your left arm for a while," stated Blaze, but the tall man did not reply.

Frenchy let his man get up, but kept a hand twisted in his collar.

"You heard the message we sent to Black Mora, didn't yuh?" asked Blaze. "Now, maybe you're tamed enough to carry it to him."

"You goin' to turn dem loose?" asked Frenchy. "Ba gosh, you got sof' heart. Whoa!"

Frenchy yanked his man backward and proceeded to administer the toe of his boot

to the spot designated by precedent for such a proceeding and alternately yanked and booted the man all the way to his horse, which the man managed to mount.

"Vamoose!" snapped Blaze.

The men rode away; one of them hugging a shattered right arm, and the other standing high in his stirrups and trying to keep his frightened horse to a comfortable walk.

Frenchy proceeded to shave a pipeful of tobacco, and lighted it from the fire embers. He turned and looked at Blaze who was leaning against a tree, watching in the direction of the disappearing horsemen.

"Blaze," Frenchy puffed furiously, "Blaze, I'm t'ink dem two feller get sore from us. You mak' —— good shot for break hees arm. Eh?"

"Good shot! Lucky shot, Frenchy—lucky for him. I never shot at his arm. You had a lot of nerve to yank that other feller plumb off his horse."

"Nerve—me?" Frenchy laughed heartily. "Why, Blaze, I'm so —— scare dat I'm forget my gun. Ho, ho, ho!"

They both laughed. Frenchy had seen Blaze shoot the heads off sage-hens, and Blaze had seen Frenchy fighting with a knife against roaring pistols, but neither was seeking glory in the other's eyes.

"We'll move back a ways as soon as it gets dark," stated Blaze. "This ain't the end of it, Frenchy. Maybe we better pack up and pull out."

"*Non!*" Frenchy shook his head vehemently. "I'm back up a little, but no pack de horse and run away. We got two rifle an' two pistol more den we have biffore dey come. Ho, ho, ho!"

Frenchy collected the four guns, which were loaded. The rifles were Sharp's, the ammunition of which fitted their rifles, but the two pistols would be useless to them after the rounds were fired, as they both used smaller caliber than those carried by Blaze and Frenchy.

Blaze kept a close watch until dark and then they moved their blankets farther back from the creek after throwing more wood on the fire. But there was no further sign of Black Mora or his men that night.

They were up at daylight. Blaze started to get breakfast, while Frenchy climbed up into the branches of a cottonwood where he perched like an owl with his rifle across his lap.

Blaze laughed at Frenchy, but Frenchy was serious.

"I'm mak' t'ink," said Frenchy, "I'm mak'——"

He broke off, rose a little higher and swung the heavy rifle to his shoulder. A moment later the big rifle bellowed. Blaze sprang across the fire and picked up his rifle.

"What yuh shootin' at?" he demanded.

Frenchy extracted the empty cartridge and blew into the breech of his rifle before replying.

"De sonn of a gonn go creep, creep along to git behin' de big rock. Ho, ho, ho! I'm push de dirt in his face. He turn over lak——"

Frenchy threw up his rifle and fired as it leveled. He waved the cloud of smoke away with a sweep of his hand.

"Dat's anodder one, Blaze. I miss him pretty close, I tell you dat. Whoa!"

Frenchy shifted excitedly.

"Blaze, you pack de cayuse —— quick! I'm mak' t'ink dat sonn of a gonn has de army work for him. I hol' dem off, I tell you."

Bullets began to whiz through the foliage and thump into the tree trunks. Blaze hurriedly packed the horse and then threw on the two saddles, while Frenchy swore alternately in English and French and punctuated his oaths with lead from his old Sharps.

"All set, Frenchy," called Blaze, swinging into his saddle.

Frenchy fired again and swung down to the ground.

"Go straight down dis side," ordered Frenchy. "I'm have dem stopped."

They rode away as swiftly as possible, keeping in the willows. For a while it looked as if they had thrown off the attackers, but as soon as they crossed the creek and struck into more open country they found that there was a strong possibility of more trouble.

One bunch of horsemen were behind them, while another bunch had circled into the hills to head them off. They pulled up and considered the matter. A long-range bullet dusted the ground at their horses' feet, fired from the bunch in the hills. They could see the riders across the creek as they checked up at the edge of the stream.

"W'at we do now—fight?" asked Frenchy.

Blaze considered. The horsemen in the

hills were still swinging around as if to join forces with those at the creek.

"They've headed us off in that direction," observed Blaze, "and it appears to me that they're danged awful sure that we want to go thataway. Well, we'll take a chance and go up the creek instead. We may have to lose our pack-horse."

"My blanket she's on de pack, and I stay wit' my bed," declared Frenchy. "De pack-horse run lak ——. Come on."

THEY turned and spurred into a gallop, traveling parallel to the creek, but in open country. There were six men in the bunch which had circled them, and five more in the crowd at the creek. Now they joined and came racing up the same side of the creek.

Both Blaze and Frenchy were well mounted, but the pack-animal, seeming to sense the need of haste, passed Frenchy, who was leading it.

"Go so fas' as you like!" yelled Frenchy and threw the rope across the pack, turning the animal loose.

They swung over a knoll and around the side of a steep slope, jumping mesquite and greasewood, and found themselves a short distance from a rambling ranch-house, which stood in the center of a clearing about three acres in extent. A long low stable and a big pole corral were between them and the house, and a pole fence surrounded the house and barn. The center pole of the bars was in place and the pack-animal tried to jump it, but the horse was not built for hurdling and came to grief.

Blaze's horse cleared the bar and the struggling pack animal, and Frenchy's horse barely clicked the rail as it went over. The pack-animal struggled to its feet, kicked at a loose rope and galloped after its master. Blaze and Frenchy swung down at the door of the ranch-house, turning the horses loose, and then went straight toward the open stalls of the barn, as if they had lived there all their lives.

Came a whirl of dust and the panting horses, as the pursuers clattered up to the bars. Blaze threw up his rifle and sent a bullet past their heads and they spurred to one side out of sight. Blaze kicked open the door, almost in the face of a fat Indian squaw, who was coming to the door to see what was going on. She stared blankly at the two men.

"Whose place is this?" asked Blaze.

"Black Mora," replied the stolid aborigine.

"Where is he?"

"I dunno. He ride away with men." The squaw spoke in halting English.

"This is going to be a hard place to leave," observed Blaze, but Frenchy was chuckling as he leaned over a rough table.

"Look, Blaze!" he called. "Here's plenty shell for de rifle. Fill up de belt and use de pocket for de rest. She's good place to fin'."

Blaze stepped over to the table and filled his belt from fresh boxes. Frenchy stuffed his pockets full and then put more inside his shirt.

"Ba gosh, she's goin' to be wan good fight, I'm tell you, Blaze."

Blaze stepped to a window and saw a man running to get behind the barn. Another was stooped low, running farther to the left where another old building would give him cover. Blaze looked around the room, which was about twenty by thirty feet in size. There were four doors, two opening outside, and the other two were connected with the rooms at each end. All the doors were fitted with heavy bars.

It was only a moment's work to throw the bars into place. The squaw watched Blaze, but her fat face expressed no emotion. The strange doings of the white men did not cause any wonder in her one-idea brain. Blaze grinned at her lack of interest.

"You like Black Mora?" he asked.

The squaw glanced at Blaze and then spat disgustedly.

"Either she hates him or she don't like my question," grinned Blaze.

The windows, of which there was one at each side of the room, were composed of two small panes of glass set in crude frames. Frenchy dumped the extra cartridges onto a shelf near the rear window, placed his pistol beside them, and calmly knocked one of the panes of glass out. Then he produced his plug of tobacco and clasp-knife and then grinned at Blaze, who was looking at the squaw.

"Blaze, you better knock out de little window and git ready for fight. Plenty time for de love-mak' after de wil' man she's went away. Ho, ho, ho!"

Frenchy chuckled heartily over his crude joke.

Blaze went back to the window and poked out one of the panes, only to have a bullet

ricochet off the barrel of his rifle and buzz across the room like an angry bee.

"Ho, ho, ho!" chortled Frenchy. "De dance she is begin, Blaze. I'm hope she don't all dance from your side, biccause my feet she's itch for git busy."

Blaze fired and was rewarded by a yell from the barn.

"Ba gosh, you don't miss dat feller," chuckled Frenchy. "I'm can tell de yelp from de ol' Sharp's bullet. She's——"

Thump! A bullet tore through the mud chinking of the cabin near Frenchy's window, and Blaze turned to see Frenchy with both hands clapped to his face, dancing a circle. He sprang across the room and grasped Frenchy's arm.

"Where'd it hit yuh?" he asked.

"De —— mud-daubers t'row dirt in my eye! Go back to your own side. Dis feller be-long to me, ba gosh!"

The squaw had sat down on the floor at the end of the room and watched the two men. She glanced at the wall, where a bullet tore into some medicine bottles on a crude shelf, but there was neither wonder nor anxiety in her face. Frenchy crouched flat against the wall, leaning out far enough to fire and then leaning back to reload.

THE attack was growing stronger now, as the Black Mora crowd found points of vantage, and they searched the house with lead from every angle. Blaze was shooting methodically, while Frenchy grew voluble with French epithets and drilled his initials on a shed door, where three men had fired at his window from a loop-hole in the logs.

Two men had attempted to reach the door of a small building about sixty yards from Blaze, but both of them failed. Blaze could see no reason for any one sacrificing his life to reach this building. Another man had come in from the rear of this building, which was built on such an angle that Blaze could only see the front and one side, and had sneaked in on the far side to the front.

His hand shot out in an attempt to lift the barred door, in which attempt he had succeeded, but Blaze shot carefully and the man's hand went out of commission. The heavy door swung open, but no man seemed foolhardy enough to try to reach the shelter of the interior.

Luckily for both Blaze and Frenchy the bullets were all coming from one direction. There was no cover from one side, consequently they were able to stay close to the window without danger of cross-fire. The remaining panes of glass were long since gone and the casing and log-ends on one side of each window had been chewed to a pulp with rifle bullets. Occasionally a bullet would splinter through the doors, but the thick seasoned wood mushroomed the soft lead until it was practically harmless.

"De gun she get —— hot," observed Frenchy, grinning across at Blaze. "How many you get?"

Blaze shook his head.

"I dunno, Frenchy. I've got two down in sight and I put a bullet through one feller's hand. Couple more I kinda figured to ache up a little, but they seem to keep shootin'."

"I'm not got none for sure." Frenchy seemed downhearted over this fact. "I'm got t'ree inside de little house, one behin' a pile of poles, and anodder one she's get in hole in de ground. I'm mak' t'ink Frenchy Ditteau —— poor shot."

He leveled his rifle and fired again.

"Ho, ho, ho! De sonn of a gonn she try to come out of de hole. I'm mak' bet she's change her mind."

Blaze nodded and grinned. His rifle barrel was so hot he could hardly hold it. Suddenly the squaw got to her feet. She sniffed at the air. Blaze watched her.

"Fire come," she said slowly. "House afire."

Blaze sniffed, but the room was hazy with powder smoke.

"I smell," stated the squaw. "Black Mora set house on fire."

"The same of which complicates things," observed Blaze.

"I'm mak' t'ink we trapped," said Frenchy. "Mus' go way pretty soon, Blaze."

A trickle of smoke began to show under one of the connecting doors and Blaze stepped over to smell of it.

"Wood smoke, Frenchy. They've set fire to our little fort."

Blaze stepped back to his rifle, but there was no one in sight. Frenchy peered out of his window, but there was no sign of his targets. Black Mora had decided to smoke out his quarry. Blaze watched the squaw walk to the farther corner of the room, where she dragged a crude bunk away from

the wall. She threw aside a pile of old sacks and skins and lifted a trap-door.

"Cellar?" queried Blaze.

"You come," ordered the squaw, and started down a short ladder.

BLAZE and Frenchy each took a last look from the windows and, as there was no sign of the besiegers, they followed the squaw.

Instead of a cellar they found a narrow low tunnel shored up with small timbers. It was pitch dark and the tunnel was barely wide enough for them to squeeze through; but they followed in single-file behind the fat squaw. It seemed as if they had gone a mile, when the squaw stopped and straightened up. Blaze reached out his hand and felt the rungs of a pole ladder, up which the squaw had started.

Came the creak of boards and the tunnel was flooded with light, as the squaw lifted another trap-door letting them into a small log-room. The open door gave them a view of part of the house they had just left.

"This is where them fellers wanted to get," whispered Blaze understandingly. "No wonder they took a chance. They could go through the tunnel, open the trap under that old bunk and nail us both."

"Sure t'ing," nodded Frenchy. "Gran' scheme, Blaze. Look at de house burn."

The ranch-house was composed of three large rooms, and the fire had been started in the north end. Black Mora had taken no chances in trying to smash the connecting door, after seeing the defenders' shooting ability; so he decided on the Indian method of routing them out.

Blaze and Frenchy crouched near the door, watching the flames eat into the seasoned logs. One end of the house was burning fiercely, and it was only a question of a short time until the whole building would be in flames.

The squaw sat down in a corner, stolidly watching the fire as if having no interest in it whatever. Blaze and Frenchy knew that at least six rifles covered the front and rear doors of the ranch-house, and were also fairly sure that the men behind those rifles believed that their quarry must soon break for liberty.

Blaze examined the walls of their room, but there was no exit except the half-open door. The squaw looked at Blaze and seemed to understand what he was looking for. Flames were soaring from the ranch-house. Came the shrill nicker of a horse; a man's voice cried an order, but above it all came the splintering crash as the pole and mud roof of one end of the ranch-house collapsed.

The squaw got to her feet and backed into a corner. The two men watched her as she fumbled along the chinking between two logs. Suddenly she shoved with her shoulder, and a section composed of two logs swung outward. The aperture was large enough to allow a man to pass through and through it they could see their three horses near the barn, watching the fire.

The logs had been cut in such a way and so hinged that they could only be opened from the inside. Evidently Black Mora had more need of an exit than an inlet.

"You go," urged the squaw. "Everybody look fire."

Blaze held out his hand to her, but she seemed ignorant of a hand-shake. He slipped a large opal ring from his finger and handed it to her. She understood this and smiled happily. It was Blaze Carlin's mascot, but he gave it willingly. He and Frenchy slipped out the aperture and the logs closed behind them.

By going straight to their horses they could keep the small cabin between them and Mora's men, unless the men had moved lately. Ducking low, they raced for the horses, but no shot followed them. It was but a moment's work to lead their horses around the corner of the barn and there they found a huddled group of saddle-horses, snorting from fright of the fire.

Frenchy chortled gleefully and wanted to cut the saddle-cinches, but Blaze stopped him. He was not afraid of Mora's men catching him once they got away and there was a chance that the gang might believe that they perished in the flames.

Frenchy grumbled at losing the chance of spoiling all possibility of pursuit, but spurred out of the clearing, riding swiftly down the creek, around the first curve and into the hills, while behind them a black cloud of smoke pillared into the sky.

"Ho, ho, ho!" Frenchy threw back his head and whooped gleefully. "Nobody she's allow on Mora's lan', eh? Blaze, you ever hear 'bout Nero?"

Blaze shook his head.

"She's lak' to be de boss, too," explained

Frenchy. "She's fire de town of Rome and den she feedle."

"She done what?" asked Blaze.

"Feedle, feedle, feedle!" Frenchy imitated the motions of playing a fiddle. "She's mak' music for de fire."

"Must 'a' been loco, Frenchy."

"Jus' so. Mak' good shepherd, eh, Blaze?"

"Make a good pardner for Black Mora."

"Ba gosh, dat's de fac'. Bot' crazy. No man can run dis countree a-lone. Mebby she mak' big try, but bimeby somebody she's come along and no run. Bam! One man no run, anodder man she's see and she's quit run. Bimeby everybody quit run. Den de man who run de countree mus' run fas' or de countree run over him."

Blaze laughed at the wisdom of Frenchy Ditteau. Back of Frenchy's black eyes was a keen mind; a brain capable of doing bigger things than fighting battles in border countries or trapping for furs.

The country needed keen minds, but Frenchy Ditteau loved action too well to live long enough in any one place. Blaze was also a drifter. The clink of poker chips, the lure of the green cloth was in his blood. His long, muscular fingers itched for the feel of playing-cards, but above it all was an indefinite longing to do something worth while.

Blaze was better educated than the majority of cowboys. He did not remember his mother; and his father was but a hazy, unreal sort of a person. Thrown on his own at an early age, he had grown to manhood, unsullied by his environment. He rode hard, drank moderately, and fought ferociously, but something in his soul seemed to cleave a deep line between right and wrong. Men said that Blaze Carlin was too honest to be a gambler—an honor conferred to few gamblers in those wild days.

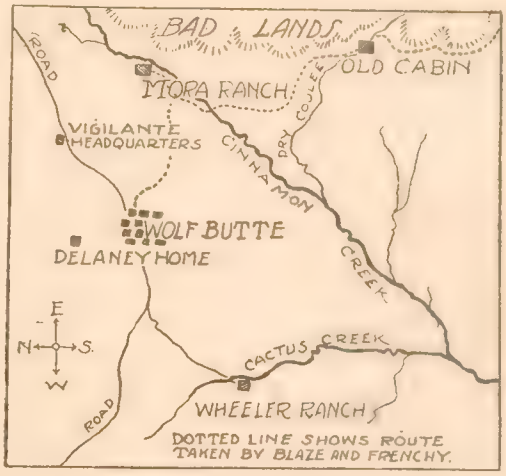
To the six-shooter has been the glory of winning the West, but it took brains behind the gun to do this. Perhaps the six-shooter did much to hold back the West—the six-shooter plus lax laws, or no law at all.

Very often a sheriff was elected for his pistol ability, regardless of his fitness for the office, and only too often they combined with evil powers to loot behind the mantle of the law.

At times an honest sheriff was elected when the law-abiding element was in the majority; but the majority were unable to give their assistance when the lawless combined against his authority.

WOLF BUTTE was a county-seat in a territorial county; a county so vast that a man could ride for a week and never reach a boundary-line. Range cattle mingled with the buffalo. Men were neighbors at fifty miles. Towns were very few and far between, with Wolf Butte the metropolis. Therefore Wolf Butte flourished, roughly speaking and more roughly acting.

It was a town of saloons, dance-halls, gambling-places, where hard-bitted men came to revel in wine, painted women and coarse song; a town, where morals were flung to the winds, like a deck of unlucky playing-cards.




There was a certain moral element; an element composed of hard-riding, God-fearing men, but they were wofully in the minority. Day or night the long hitch-racks of the main street were lined with saddle-horses, standing patiently, often for days at a time, while their masters lounged in the smoke-festooned gambling houses and pitted their weak wisdom against games which did not operate for any one's health.

Wolf Butte lived fast—living today, for tomorrow might never come.

Into this town rode Blaze Carlin and Frenchy Ditteau; rode past the gambling-halls, where the rattle of poker-chips sang a siren song to Blaze's ears. To Frenchy it only meant mingling with other men, a drink or two, much useless argument and

perhaps trouble; but Frenchy welcomed it all. He liked the drink or two, loved an argument, and fighting only added zest to life.

They went straight to a livery-stable and turned their horses over to the stable-man. On the wall of the grain-room was a prominent, crudely painted sign:

**LEAVE YOUR GUNS HERE OR TURN THEM OVER TO THE SHERIFF THIS MEANS YOU**

Blaze read it aloud and turned to the stable-man.

"Does that sign mean what she says?"

The man laughed and shook his head.

"I reckon not, pardner. Yuh see, we ain't got no sheriff. Him and his under-sheriff got run out by the vigilantes."

"What did they do that for?"

"I dunno." The man shook his head and turned away. It was evident that he did not care to discuss the matter.

"Lak' I'm say biffore," observed Frenchy. "She's de good t'ing at de right time. I'm hongry inside, Blaze. Mebbe we better find de ham and de egg, eh?"

Blaze agreed readily. Mora's gang had interrupted their breakfast and they had not made a stop since leaving Mora's ranch, which was about twelve miles from Wolf Butte. They walked down the dusty street to a restaurant.

Riders came galloping into the street, their horses kicking up clouds of dust. Freight-wagons creaked in, the mules dusty and tired, the drivers bitterly profane. Here were no traffic laws. An empty wagon, with a torn schooner-cover, swerved to the left of a heavy freighter and their front wheels locked.

The freighter screamed an oath and swung his whip at the other driver, while the teams lunged wildly. In the swirl of dust, both riders got to the ground and fought each other like madmen, while a gathering crowd cheered them.

The veil of alkali dust made the fighters appear as an out-of-focus picture. Suddenly the freighter went down. The other driver sprang to his seat, backed his vehicle away from the heavy freighter and drove away, hatless, coatless but triumphant, while willing hands helped the freighter back into his wagon. The street cleared and the fight was forgotten.

At the door of a restaurant Blaze stopped and threw up his head. The gambling fever was upon him again. Directly across the street was a huge sign:

**EUREKA SALOON AND GAMBLING PALACE**

A violin screeched an old jig-tune; an out-of-tune piano was jangling notes, while above it all came the husky voice of a woman, singing "Suwanee River." Her voice broke harshly on a high note and a burst of coarse laughter showed that the audience had been amused.

A bouncer propelled a quarrelsome drunk out of the wide door and the unfortunate one sprawled into the street from a well-directed kick. All the saloon doors were double width, wide open so as not to obstruct any rider who was in too much of a hurry to dismount for his drink.

"She's a —— bad town," declared Frenchy as they sat down at a greasy table where linen and silverware were unknown.

"Man for breakfast every mornin', stranger," smiled a bearded man at the next table. "Everythin' goes in Wolf Butte. Railroad's within seventy miles of here now and the stakes sure cuts close to the main street."

Came a scattered volley of pistol shots from up the street and several men rode swiftly past the restaurant.

"More punchers in for a bust," observed the stranger. "They sure does salute the town since the sheriff hit for the hills."

"Vigilantes run him out?" asked Blaze.

"Accordin' to the notice tacked on his door."

The stranger attacked his meal and Blaze and Frenchy turned back to their own business of eating. More men drifted in to eat and the place was filled when Blaze and Frenchy paid for their meal and went across the street to the Eureka. The games were running full blast. Blaze waited until a man cashed in his poker-winnings and then slipped into his place, tossing a piece of gold to the dealer, who shoved the chips across the table.

Frenchy leaned against the bar, his keen eyes taking in the place. Painted women, with scarlet lips and painted cheeks, dressed in cheap finery, mingled with the men, their shrill laughter audible above the roar of male conversation.

Two fiddlers added to the general confusion by screeching out a hoe-down. Three bartenders dished out cheap whisky, while rough waiters hurried hither and yon, carrying orders to the games or to those unable to navigate from table to bar.

Frenchy was looking toward the door as three men came in. The man in the lead was inches taller than any man in the room. His neck was so short that it appeared his head was set flush with his shoulders, his long arms swinging even below the bottom of his holstered gun.

His face was like a piece of carved mahogany, carved to a perpetual sneer, and his eyes were black as ink and without depth. A lock of greasy hair curved down over his forehead from under the back-flung brim of his sombrero. He wore a beaded vest, heavy with brass ornaments, and below it flashed the two heavy silver buckles of his ornamented belt. His chaps were heavily ornamented with silver studs and carved rosettes, and the spurs above his high heels were heavy with silver and gold.

He stopped and swept the crowd with his eyes, his glance traveling from man to man. He only gave Frenchy a passing glance and then turned to the bar. The two men stepped in beside him. A bartender hurried to take their order. The big man slopped the liquor on the bar indifferently and then spat out his drink.

"Rotten!" he snapped and flipped the uncorked bottle off the bar under his feet where it gurgled its contents along the rough floor. "Gimme good whisky, —— you!" he roared at the bartender. "None of that pizen!"

The bartender placed another bottle on the bar, along with fresh glasses.

"That's the best in town, Mora," said the bartender.

"Don't tell me what's the best!" growled Mora. "I'll do the talkin'."

Frenchy studied the big man. So this was Black Mora. Frenchy looked at the huge, hairy wrists, the big, powerful hands; the shoulders of an ape. Mora's forehead was broad and intelligent, but the back of his huge head was almost flat. His hips were narrow and his feet small.

Frenchy noted that Mora's gun had a beautifully carved handle. In Frenchy's mind there was not the slightest doubt but that Black Mora was deadly efficient. The two men with him were ordinary cow-puncher types, well trained to follow their master.

Mora turned and saw Frenchy looking at him. There was nothing offensive in Frenchy's attitude; rather he was admiring this huge piece of fighting machinery. Mora placed his glass on the bar and turned toward Frenchy.

"Whatcha lookin' at?" he growled, eyes half-closed.

Frenchy feigned not to have heard the question and turned his head slowly toward the poker-table. Blaze Carlin was looking at Mora. He and Frenchy exchanged glances and Frenchy turned back to Mora.

"Didja hear what I said?" growled Mora.

Frenchy smiled and shook his head. "De little question she's get lost in all dis talk. I'm ver' sorry."

"Frog-eater!" rumbled Mora, stepping closer and glowering at Frenchy.

Blaze moved his chair back from the table slowly, watching Mora. As Blaze's right hand drew back from his chips he touched a heavy glass beer mug. His fingers twined into the handle and he leaned forward in his chair. Frenchy had not moved. Mora's throat rumbled a curse and his right hand shot out to grasp Frenchy by the throat, but Blaze shot to his feet and flung the beer mug with such unerring aim that it caught Black Mora over his right ear, when the latter's hand was brushing Frenchy's chin.

Mora dropped like a log. For a moment nobody spoke nor made a move. Frenchy leaned against the bar, the butt of his pistol braced against his right hip, covering Mora's two men.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he chuckled. "De beer mug save Mora's life. I'm to kill him when he touch me, de beeg pig!"

Mora stirred and then sat up, staring vacantly. His eyes fastened on Frenchy and the muzzle of the unwavering pistol. He put his hand to his head and drew it away stained with blood. His eyes traveled around the saloon, as if seeking the man who had hit him. He got to his feet and leaned against the bar, his eyes narrowed to mere slits. Frenchy did not move a muscle.

The room had gone suddenly still. Then a woman laughed harshly and Black Mora's muscles seemed to jerk from the insult. It was as if some one had laughed when a king fell.

Blaze stepped away from the poker-table and walked half-way to Mora. The two men looked at each other for several moments and then Blaze spoke evenly:

"I throwed that glass. Yuh don't know it, but I saved your life. 'Pears to me that you ain't been weaned long, or yuh wouldn't reach for an armed man."

Again came the harsh, cackling laugh from the whisky-raw female throat. Mora seemed to quiver with suppressed anger. His tongue passed along his thick, lower lip. Then he spoke—

"You know who I am?"

Blaze smiled and shook his head.

"I am Black Mora."

It was as if he had said—"I am the king."

"Never heard of yuh," replied Blaze, "but you sure have a hard head, pardner. How's all your folks down on the farm?"

Frenchy chuckled aloud.

"Black Mora, eh? I'm mak' you acquaint wit' Blaze Carlin, Black Mora."

Mora was like a teased tiger, which knew that steel bars kept him from wreaking vengeance on his tormentors. In this case the bars were Frenchy and his big pistol, which had never wavered; the pointed hammer back at full-cock, like the head of a snake about to strike. Mora's face settled back to its perpetual sneer and he turned on his heel and walked out, followed by his two men. As he went out of the door he was followed by the woman's derisive laugh.

Frenchy flipped his pistol back into its holster. Blaze turned back to the table, where men were staring at him. The man in the lookout chair spoke:

"Mister, you've kinda put yourself in bad. That's Black Mora and—and——"

"He said that's who he was," smiled Blaze. "Is he supposed to be so bad?"

The men around the table shifted uneasily. It was rather a personal question as no man seemed to know who was in Mora's confidence. Blaze glanced around the circle and then laughed.

"Don't nobody tell me he's a bad-man, 'cause I won't believe it. He's a big, black bully. Some kid will chase him off the range some day, with a tin can full of rocks hangin' to his shirt-tail."

The dealer picked up the cards, glanced at the door uneasily and went on dealing. Frenchy still leaned against the bar, smiling around the room. The place grew animated again, but hilarity was forced. The king had been humiliated, disgraced and none knew when the king might try to wipe out the stain—nor how.

There was a man at the poker-table who did not seem of the same caliber as the rest of the crowd. He was past middle age, slow of movements, soft of voice. He played methodically, unemotional, as if thinking deeply. His hair and mustache were nearly white and his eyes seemed to hold nothing but kindness to all men.

Blaze looked up to see the blue eyes fastened upon him inquiringly. It was as if the man were asking a question. Blaze smiled at him, and for some reason half-nodded as if answering the unspoken question.

After a few more hands the blue-eyed man cashed in his chips and got up from the game. Another was waiting for his chair. He straightened his collar and sauntered toward the door. Blaze felt that his interest in the game was waning; so he also cashed in and let another take his place. The blue-eyed man was standing at the door, looking outside, and Blaze went straight to him, walking slowly. He did not speak directly to the man, but kept his face toward the door as he said—

"I kinda reckon you wants to talk to me, pardner?"

The other shifted his feet and continued to stare at the door.

"Not here. At the west end of town, a quarter of a mile away, is a house, standing alone. Can you be there an hour after dark—you and your pardner?"

"Uh-huh."

"Look out for Mora."

"I ain't a bit sleepy, pardner."

The man yawned and walked out of the door. Blaze turned slowly and walked up to Frenchy.

"Thirsty?" he asked.

"I'm mak' t'ink we better off wit'out drink, Blaze." Frenchy spoke softly. "Whisky ver' good when everybody she's happy, but nobody she act happy over de Mora business. Mebbe de sonn of a gonn she's need more convince, eh?"

"I reckon you're right, Frenchy. Come on."

THEY sauntered out of the door into the street, and once more the Eureka seemed to grow hilarious; as if a weight had been removed from its mind. Blaze told Frenchy of his conversation with the man.

"He no say w'at he want? Ba gosh! Mebbe she's trap from Black Mora."

Blaze shook his head.

"No, I reckon not, Frenchy. I'll take that chance."

"Sure 'nough. I'm bet Black Mora mak' t'ink we die in de fire. He not know us. His two men see us close, but one is got busted arm and de oder she's no set on saddle for week. I'm like dis —— town, Blaze. Ba gosh, nobody's she get rusty from live her, you bet me my life."

Several cowboys whirled their horses away from a hitch-rack, and one of them came bucking down the center of the street, its rider swinging sidewise in the saddle, his right spur hooked into the cinch, while he fanned the bronco's ears with his sombrero.

Another forced his horse to enter the saloon, spurring the frightened beast into a jerky buck as it went inside and a few moments later bucked out again with a big bottle held aloft in his hand. His horse passed Blaze and Frenchy in a whirl of dust as he raced to catch the others.

Across the street was a sign: SHERIFF'S OFFICE. A notice was pinned to the door. Blaze and Frenchy crossed the street and read the notice.

**CLOSED BY ORDER OF VIGILANT**

Blaze studied the crudely lettered sign.

"The same man wrote both signs—this one and the one we found on that dead man, Frenchy. The letters are made just the same way."

"What dis wan say?" asked Frenchy.

Blaze read it aloud.

"Ba gosh!" exclaimed Frenchy. "I'm mak' t'ink de lawyer starve to death in dis countree. De hangman she's good for do de hang, but she's —— poor judge, I'm t'ink."

"Crooked sheriff, I reckon," observed Blaze. "The vigilantes likely found him out and made him hard to catch."

They strolled from saloon to saloon, but there was no sign of Black Mora nor his two men. Frenchy watched Blaze walk past game after game without interest, and wondered what had come over his partner. Somehow the games of chance did not attract Blaze now.

No one paid any attention to them, which proved that news of Black Mora's humiliation had not reached their ears. Every one seemed intent on his own pleasures. Groups of cow-punchers drifted from saloon to saloon, singing, playing like a crowd of overgrown children; their spurs jingling over the rough floors.

Already the huge, shaded oil-lamps had been lighted over the gambling-tables, and their smoky odors mingled with the scent of alcohol and tobacco fumes. Dealers finished their shifts and made way for fresh, clear-eyed men, in shirt sleeves and eye-shades. Blaze and Frenchy sat tilted back against the wall, watching the action of the place, but taking no part in it. Finally, Blaze tilted forward and got to his feet. It was time to go.

He spoke to Frenchy and they threaded their way through the crowd and into the street. They saddled their own horses, paid the small fee and rode away. A pale moon lighted the dusty road while a film of dust cloud seemed to hang above the road, marking the swift passing of some one a short time before.

The house was easy to find, standing alone, bulking black in the dim moonlight. Not a window was lighted; not a horse nor a vehicle was in evidence.

"Must be the right place," observed Blaze, swinging sidewise in his saddle.

The door opened and the blue-eyed man's voice spoke—

"Would you mind leaving your horses behind the house where no one could see them from the road?"

"Sure thing," replied Blaze, and they rode to the rear.

The door was opened for them and they stepped into a dark room. The door was closed behind them. A match flared up and they watched a man light a small oil-lamp. As the glow lighted up the room they glanced around. Sitting in a semi-circle were at least a dozen men. Blaze glanced at the window and saw that it was covered with several thicknesses of blankets. The lamp had likely been extinguished before opening the door.

The blue-eyed man stepped beside Blaze and spoke to the men.

"Gentlemen, these are the two men. One of them knocked Black Mora down in the Eureka this afternoon. His pardner would have killed Mora in another moment. They are strangers in Wolf Butte."

A tall, rangy man got to his feet and held out his hand to Blaze.

"Pardner, I'd admire to shake your hand."

Blaze smiled and shook hands with him. Not to be outdone, Frenchy stepped forward and offered his hand.

"Ba gosh, you shake hands wit' good man, when you shake wit' Blaze Carlin and Frenchy Ditteau."

That seemed to break the tension.

"You are wondering why I asked you to come here, aren't you?" asked the blue-eyed man.

"Feller kinda like to know," admitted Blaze.

"You do the talkin', will yuh, judge?" asked one of the men. "You *sabe* the kinda stuff to say."

The blue-eyed man nodded and turned to Blaze.

"I am Judge Whalen. These men—" indicating the semicircle of men—"these men and myself compose the vigilance committee."

"Ba gosh, you be ashamed!" blurted Frenchy. "You hang old crippled man."

Judge Whalen glanced at the men and back at Frenchy.

"What was that, Ditteau?"

"We buried a victim of the vigilantes yesterday," replied Blaze. "It was an old man."

"Another one," said the judge sadly. "Where was this done, Carlin?"

Blaze tried to describe the place, but was interrupted by one of the men, who got to his feet.

"I know the place, judge, but I don't know the man. It's west of Mora's ranch. This man has only been there a short time. I talked with him, but he had little to say. He acted kinda queer."

"Their idea seems to be to kill, regardless of who their victim may be," observed the judge, but turned quickly to Blaze. "I forgot that you did not know. We are the original vigilance committee, but we have not been active for over two months.

"Law and order seemed to have been established by us, after all other means had failed. Our sheriff was unable to handle the situation; so we gave him our assistance and then disbanded.

"Since then another organization has appeared, operating under our name; an organization which has undone all our good work, put us to shame, and are now terrorizing the country. Murder after murder has been done in the name of the vigilantes. Our sheriff has disappeared, perhaps killed, and his office door bears a warning from the vigilantes.

"No man knows where they will strike next. The cripple you found hanging to the tree is only one of the many they have murdered. No doubt you are aware that the law and order crowd are greatly in the minority. We were a power for a while, but that power is gone, it seems. Our investigations are useless as no man seems to want to tell what he knows for fear of vengeance.

"The bank has closed its door after a raid by the same gang, in which the cashier, one of our organization, was killed. Stores have been looted. Things have come to such a state that a decent woman does not dare be seen on the street of Wolf Butte. You have seen the reckless riding, shooting, profanity, the flaunting of morals. Each day it grows worse."

"She sure is a stem-winder, judge," admitted Blaze. "What do yuh want us to do?"

"You knocked Black Mora down today. It is the first time that any man has raised his hand against Mora and lived. He is the swiftest, most deadly pistol-shot in the country; a man without a shred of conscience. The men who work for him are the pick of the outlaws. There is no question but what he has spies everywhere. Five of our organization have been killed.

"You will ask why we do not remove Black Mora? He has a larger organization than we have. He knows our every move. Practically every man in our crowd is married. I am not ashamed to admit to you that we are afraid. Honest men can not be on their guard every moment. No man will accept the sheriff's office. It is suicide. We want a man who is unafraid and who is willing to put his soul, his life into it."

Judge Whalen's voice was softly pitched; impassioned as if pleading before a jury of twelve instead of telling plain facts to two men. The shadows of the cattlemen bulked grotesquely on the wall, as they humped forward, listening intently to the one man among them who could tell calmly of their wrongs.

Blaze got to his feet and adjusted his belt. The flickering light accentuated the bronze high-lights of his Indian-like features and

seemed to intensify the white strip of hair.

"Can yuh make a sheriff without an election?" he asked.

"By appointment," nodded the judge, "We have with us the commissioners of this county, who may, in the event of no incumbent, appoint a sheriff to serve the remainder of the unexpired term."

"A sheriff wouldn't have a chance in the world," objected a grizzled cowman. "That's why nobody wants the job."

"I wish you'd appoint Frenchy Ditteau for sheriff," said Blaze. "Frenchy'd make a danged good sheriff."

"Ba gosh, I'm vote for Blaze Carlin," declared Frenchy. "I'm——"

"Why not you?" asked the judge.

Blaze shook his head.

"Judge, you need brains in that office. Frenchy has more *sabe* than I have. If you can make him sheriff, I'll be his deputy."

"It wouldn't be quite legal," stated the judge. "Neither of you are voters here."

"Just came into the State," admitted Blaze.

Another of the group got to his feet.

"Judge, I says to —— with legality! We're considerin' right and wrong—not law. I dunno how these two men aims to be of a —— bit of use to us as a sheriff and deputy, but I'm willin' to help appoint 'em."

"Have you any ideas of what you are confronting?" asked the judge.

Blaze laughed.

"I've been a gambler most of my life, judge. I ain't never cared much for law and order until I helped cut down an old man who had been hung. He was a cripple in one knee and his old hands was twisted from disease. He couldn't neither run nor shoot. I don't reckon I'd ever feel good if I didn't do somethin' to pay back the men who done that."

"De devil do dat job," added Frenchy, "I'm not 'fraid from any men w'at hang ol' men. Bimeby I'm be ol' man, I'm t'ink, an' I'm no lak' to stand on wind and look up de rope, ba gosh!"

"Hirin' Frenchy for sheriff likely won't be legal," stated Blaze, "but neither is hangin' legal, when yuh do it promiscuous-like. It ain't because we want to be sheriff, gents. Me and Frenchy are just two ordinary men and we ain't able to do no more than any two ordinary men, but bein' sheriff and deputy kinda gives us somethin' to work on. We only asks one favor of yuh, and that is to let us handle it in our own way. Yuh can never do anythin' by arguin' with 'em, gents. If we takes this job there won't be no questions asked nor answered."

The judge turned to the group.

"Men, I will write out the appointment at once, if you all agree. I think it will be a good night's work for the country."

"She be —— bad luck for some-bodee," grinned Frenchy enthusiastically. "Frenchy Ditteau, sheriff, eh? I'm get scare of myself, Blaze. Ho, ho, ho! Wolf Butte get 'fraid for scare, when she's see de sheriff. Bimeby I'm hire de cow-punch to ride herd on de outlaw, biccause I'm t'ink de jail too small. Ho, ho, ho!"

The men grouped around the table, while Judge Whalen penciled the appointment and had it signed. He handed it to Frenchy.

"This is your authority, Mr. Ditteau."

"Meester Ditteau." Frenchy repeated the title as he grinned down at the document, which he could not read, and then put it in his pocket.

"Ba gosh, Frenchy Ditteau got regular job now. I'm t'ink de wolf and grizzly move in close, biccause dere be plenty feed bimeby. Ho, ho, ho!"

"Please do not underrate Black Mora," said the judge seriously. "Bully he may be, but I do not think he is a coward. He has a heart as black as his face and he wields a dangerous power. I know you do not fear him, but I ask you to respect his ability."

"Anybody else need watchin'?" asked Blaze.

"Everybody." The judge's gesture even encompassed present company. "Wolf Butte has become the hangout of every outlaw from Wyoming to Canada. This railroad will bring in the scum of the earth and Wolf Butte will be their headquarters. Unless conditions change, this town will be a red hell and we'll pay for the pitch."

"Ba gosh, I'm lak' dis town," grinned Frenchy. "I'm t'ink I'm stay here and grow up wit' her."

Blaze and Frenchy shook hands with the men, the lamp was extinguished and they all filed outside. The moon was hidden by clouds.

"We want to wish you the best of luck," said the judge softly.

"I—I reckon we'll need considerable," smiled Blaze. "It looks kinda stormy."

"Our horses are over in the coulée," explained one of the men, and without further conversation they filed away in the dark, while Frenchy and Blaze rode back to the blazing lights of Wolf Butte, where they stabled their horses and went straight to the sheriff's office. The door was unlocked. Inside they found two small cots and several blankets.

Blaze barred the door and they went to bed. The street echoed with galloping hoofs, the shouts of drunken men and women. From the dance-halls came the raucous notes of an orchestra as Wolf Butte danced. Blaze stared up at the dark ceiling of the office and wondered why he did not want to join the revelry; wondered why the green cloth had no attraction for him now.

From Frenchy's cot came a stentorian snore. The new sheriff was doing no unnecessary worrying over the morrow. Blaze grinned and stretched his full length. Men had shaken his hand and expressed confidence in him—honest men. He was no longer Blaze Carlin, gambler; he was Blaze Carlin, the right arm of the law. He flexed his supple fingers and wondered how long the arm of the law would last. At least, it would start reaching.

WOLF BUTTE was a different place in the light of the morning sun. Few men were on the street. Swampers sluiced out the saloons and gambling-houses, sweeping out stacks of torn and stained playing-cards; cleaning up for the day and night to come. Freighters' wagons, with red-eyed, cursing drivers, creaked away from the stores, headed back to the source of supplies.

Men were packing a bunch of horses in front of a store. A hatless, disheveled person staggered out of a saloon and started across the street. He stopped and looked up at the sky, as if amazed that it should be morning. Perhaps he was ashamed to be seen in the full light of day for he staggered back from whence he came. There was no breeze and the passing of hoof and wheel left a film of alkali dust in the air; a film through which the heat waves began to dance a devil's jig.

Wolf Butte awoke slowly—painfully. It was useless to try to sleep in that heat. Men began to drift from the overcrowded hotels to the saloons. Men rolled out of their blankets at the feed corrals. The loft of the livery-stable furnished lodging for those unable to secure a bed. The bare ground furnished lodging for those who were unable to secure rooms, or were physically unable to reach loft, hotel or feed corral.

Dry of throat, bloodshot of eye and silent of voice, they headed for the oases of the town where, after a few crooks of the elbow, they would revive in spirit. Breakfast might or might not be forgotten. It was all according to the degree of thirst and the amount of liquid refreshments taken aboard before the pangs of hunger had a chance to manifest itself. Blaze and Frenchy were the first ones at breakfast.

A frowsy waiter, with one side of his face purpled from temple to nostril and a smear of blood on his collar, took their order. He mumbled something about a big time last night, but Blaze and Frenchy gave him no heed. Two men came in and sat down near them. One of them was explaining that his partner had been too drunk to see.

"I tell yuh that Chuck Sales would 'a' nailed Mex Free jist like that." The speaker snapped his fingers. "Jist like that, but he seen that Mex had a busted arm. Chuck and Mex had a argument to settle. Seems that Mex comes in to have Doc Brenton fix up his arm, but doc's full of morphine and ain't worth a —— to fix nothin'."

"Mex would git Sales if he wasn't hurt," argued the other. "I'd like to know who got Mex. Must 'a' been a accident, 'cause Mex is fast as a rattlesnake. He ain't Mora's right-hand man for nothin'. Somebody told Chuck that Mora's ranch-house burned down, and of course Chuck had to make a fool remark about the vigilantes. I sure looked for some of Mora's gang to git Chuck. Chuck's always talkin' funny."

"What's Chuck got against Mora?" asked the other.

"Jealous, I reckon. Chuck Sales don't want nobody he can't boss and Mora won't have nobody he can't boss; so it—say, him and Mora'd make a good fight."

"Chuck would whip him." The man spoke with conviction, but the other laughed scornfully.

"Whip him? Mora's big enough to tie Chuck in a hard knot. If Mora ever got

his hands on Chuck he'd jist squash him complete."

"Big enough," agreed the other, "but size ain't everythin', Jud. Jist between me and you, I think Mora's shy on guts."

The one called Jud laughed.

"Don'tcha think it, Ben. Mora's got the guts of a grizzly, so he has."

"In size," grinned Jud. "Only in size. The back of his head's as flat as that there wall. I ain't never seen a flat-head yet what ain't lacked that somethin' which makes men fight to the last ditch."

"Sh-h-h!" cautioned Ben. "Yuh don't need to yell it."

The two men attacked their meal. More men drifted in, growling over their meals like hungry animals. Many of them bore marks of drunken conflict. Then came a tall man, stumbling in, his arm tied in a dirty sling. He pushed a man aside and sat down heavily.

Blaze and Frenchy glanced at each other and then at this newcomer. It was Mex Free, the man whom Blaze had shot in the arm near Mora's ranch. He glowered around the room, his left hand rattling his knife on the table-edge nervously. Suddenly he looked straight at Blaze and Frenchy.

His face seemed to set in deep lines, his eyes almost disappeared under this frowning brows. He licked his lips and his hand, still holding the knife, brushed across his brow, as he tried to fathom the mystery. Blaze nudged Frenchy with his knee and whispered without moving his lips—

"He thinks we were burned in that fire."

Free turned away, staring around the room, but his glance strayed back to Blaze and Frenchy and without a backward glance he got to his feet and stumbled out through the door. No one paid any attention to his going except Blaze and Frenchy.

"I'm mak' t'ink you're right," grinned Frenchy. "She's t'ink she sees ghos', ba gosh!"

They left the restaurant and went back to the office. Blaze tore the sign off the door and made another, which read—

OPEN FOR BUSINESS, and signed it FRENCHY DITTEAU, SHERIFF.

A man stopped and watched Blaze tack the sign on the door. Being unable to read and not being ashamed to acknowledge it he asked Blaze to read it aloud to him. The man made no comment, but turned and went across the street into a saloon. A few minutes later a curious crowd came over to prove the rumor that Wolf Butte had a new sheriff. It seemed to amuse them, but they withheld their laughter until they went back to the saloon where they became hilarious. Blaze and Frenchy listened to their mirth, but failed to be infected with the humor of the situation.

Blaze suggested that they replenish their supply of ammunition, and they went up to the general store, where the storekeeper welcomed them with a smile.

"I met yuh last night," he informed them in a whisper. "Name's McQuirk, Jim McQuirk."

"You was with the judge?" asked Blaze and McQuirk nodded.

He furnished them with the required ammunition and refused to accept pay.

"It's the least I can do," he stated.

From under the counter he produced a Winchester repeating rifle, 44-40, which he handed to Blaze, along with several boxes of ammunition.

"Take this and try it out. I dunno how she shoots. It was sent to me from Helena and I ain't never shot it. She's faster than the Sharp's."

Blaze grinned.

"I *sabe* that gun, pardner. Feller down on the north fork of the Cheyenne had one and I used it on antelope. I'm sure obliged to yuh."

"You're welcome, Carlin."

Other men came in, but paid no attention to Blaze and Frenchy, who went out and back to their office. A crowd was congregated in front of the Square Deal saloon, and several of them laughed aloud as they watched Blaze and Frenchy go down the street.

"What's our first move?" asked Blaze, after they reached the office.

Frenchy examined the new gun, testing the action, peering through the sights. Finally he laid it down and began filling the empty loops on his belt.

"Blaze, de notice in de livery-stable she's to be continue."

"Make 'em give up their guns?" wondered Blaze.

"Sure t'ing."

"Means that we've got to make good a-whoopin'."

"Jus' like de sign say," nodded Frenchy. "I'm be de sheriff or not. I'm say dat no

man she's can pack de gun in town. Whisky, card, female no mix good wit' de gun. I'm no can stop de whisky, card, female, but I'm stop de gun, ba gosh! I'm go by de stable. You mak' Frenchy Dit-teau on de sign, eh? I'm tak' de new gun, Blaze. De Sharp's is good gun, but I'm need more fas' shoot, mebbe."

They went back to the stable and Blaze signed the new sheriff's name to the order.

"Was this order ever enforced?" asked Blaze.

"No, it sure wasn't." The stable-man seemed greatly amused at the question. "Yuh can't do a thing like that, pardner. Wolf Butte won't stand for nothin' like that and yuh can cinch your hull to that statement."

THREE men rode into the wide doors of the stable and got off their horses. They were a hard-looking trio, grimy from a long ride. They turned their horses in stalls and started for the door, when Frenchy called to them.

"Tak' look," said Frenchy pointing at the sign.

They stopped and glanced at the sign. One of them laughed and swung on his heel.

"Come on, boys; that don't mean nothin'."

"She's mean w'at she say!" snapped Frenchy. "I'm de sheriff and you leave your gun wit' me."

The man looked at Frenchy, as if astonished. He looked at the sign again and laughed sneeringly.

"You the sheriff?"

"You leave de gun wit' me." Frenchy's voice was softly pitched, as if asking a favor. His left hand swung out, as if to receive the gun, his fingers working nervously. It was as if he was crumbling something in the palm of his hand.

"Leave—my—gun? With—you?" The man's words were widely spaced as he stared at Frenchy's left hand.

Astonishment seemed to grip him, but indignation flashed across his eyes and his hand streaked for his gun. He was a fraction of a second too late. Frenchy fired from his hip and at the crack of the gun Blaze covered the other two.

The man's hand relaxed from his gun which thudded to the soggy floor. Over his face came an astonished expression. He knitted his brows as if deep in thought and then sank to his knees, after which he slid softly on his face.

"De gun stay wit' me," declared Frenchy without emotion, reaching down and picking it up from the floor.

He turned to the astonished men and removed the guns from their holsters. Then he pointed down at the man on the floor.

"You pack de man down to de sheriff office. If you t'ink de doctor do heem any good—you call heem. I'm stay here to collect de gun."

Without a word the two men picked up their companion and carried him out of the stable followed by Blaze who directed them. Men saw them going down the street and followed to the office, where they clustered around the door. No questions were asked and no information given.

A man came up to Blaze and touched him on the arm. He was collarless and unshaven, wearing a hat which was minus the crown, but there was a certain refinement about his face that hinted of better things.

"Have them take him to my place," said the man hoarsely. "They know where. I—I am Doc Brenton."

Blaze spoke to the men and they turned and followed the doctor down the street.

"I wonder what in —— happened to Jim Clell?" said one of the crowd.

Blaze turned and looked at the speaker.

"He refused to obey orders," said Blaze.

A man laughed.

"Somebody givin' orders to Jim Clell?"

"The sheriff," said Blaze.

"It was an even break," stated the voice of the stable-man who had followed them. "Jim reached for his gun first. I never seen nothin' like it. Jim was hit before he could grip his gun. I've seen guns come out fast, gents; but nothin' like this new sheriff and his deputy drawed 'em. They could yell 'draw,' spit on their hands and still beat Jim Clell."

The stable-man's exaggeration was accepted for what it was worth, but Wolf Butte knew that Jim Clell was as good as their best with a gun.

"I don't *sabe* this sheriff proposition," said one of the men.

"My pardner was appointed last night," explained Blaze. "Wolf Butte is through runnin' hog-wild. Yuh can pass the word that law and order is comin' back to this country and she's comin' so —— fast that some of these snake-hunters had better hunt a hole or get run over."

"Vigilantes failed, did they?" grinned a man.

Blaze ignored the question and went inside. The crowd split up, muttering their individual opinions, which were not at all favorable to such proceedings. Frenchy had started the ball to rolling in the right way. Luckily he had downed one of the well-known outlaws, instead of one of the rank and file. This might make others hesitate to cross him.

Blaze knew that Wolf Butte was shocked. Of course there was a danger of having the whole lawless element against them, but, again there was a chance the different factions might split in their opinions. There were at least three different gangs, who were openly hostile to each other—Mora's, Sales' and McKeever's.

Black Mora had the greatest following, but there was something about Chuck Sales' crowd which savored of cold efficiency. There was bad blood between Sales and Mora, which is the usual thing between outlaw leaders, both of whom desired supremacy. McKeever had a small following, but was known personally as a hard man to handle. He seemed content to let Sales and Mora fight it out.

Respect for the law is born in all men. There is a psychological something that gives a peace officer a slight edge over the criminal. Perhaps it is psychology of knowing that right will win. The outlaw, regardless of his ability, hides from the law, knowing that sooner or later he will pay the penalty, for down in his heart he fears the law and when fear grips him he is no match for the man who is backed by the right.

Blaze knew this. He knew nothing of psychology, but he knew that he owned this slight edge over the outlaw. The shooting of Jim Clell had affected him no more than if Frenchy had shot at a target. He did not know Jim Clell. He wondered what would have happened had he and Frenchy ridden into Wolf Butte and some one had demanded their guns. Perhaps they would have done as Jim Clell did.

"She's all in the point of view," said Blaze aloud.

"Which is whatever," admitted a voice at the door.

Blaze swung around. The man was hardly past thirty, broad of shoulders and deep of chest. His hair and mustache were bleached to a light-straw color and his eyes were pale blue. His face was burned to a brick-red and his nose had been broken at some distant time, which left the high bridge of the organ in such a position that it appeared to be falling over into one of the eye-sockets. One of his cheeks was filled with tobacco, the cheek on the same side as the falling nose, which gave him a peculiar lopsided expression.

"Howdy," nodded Blaze. "I forgot I spoke out loud."

The man came inside and looked around.

"You the sheriff?"

"No, I'm the under-sheriff," said Blaze. "Name's Blaze Carlin."

The man stuck out his hand.

"I'm Chuck Sales. I kinda want to git this sheriff business straight, Carlin."

Blaze shook hands with him.

"I heard two men talking about you this morning, Sales. You don't like Black Mora, it seems."

Sales stared at Blaze.

"Do you like him?"

"I can live without him," smiled Blaze.

"I hear yuh can," nodded Sales. "Dad Henderson tells me that yuh hit Mora in the ear with a beer glass and knocked him down. My ——, I wish I could 'a' seen that. Seems like I never happen to be around when anythin' pleasant is bein' done."

Sales seemed greatly disappointed. He walked back to the door and spat out into the street.

"Somebody told me that yuh nailed Jim Clell today. What's the idea?"

There was nothing offensive about Sales' question; only mild interest.

"Wolf Butte needs law and order," said Blaze, "and we're goin' to supply it, Sales."

Sales nodded and scratched his crooked nose.

"I dunno but you're right. Wolf Butte is kinda ornery. I don't like it m'self, Carlin. It brings so —— many crooks here that a honest outlaw don't have no chance to make a livin'."

Blaze laughed, but Sales did not lose his serious expression.

"It's a fact," insisted Sales. "I don't like this idea of ——in' around in the town. I've lost two —— good men lately. It's got so's I've got to watch behind and in front or git leaded.

"Yessir, it's got so a feller has to gunfight somebody all the time to have

anybody respect him. I'm a horse-thief, Carlin. This —— town is spoilin' my boys, don'tcha know it? I can't git 'em sober long enough to even steal a jackass."

Blaze laughed joyously. Here was something different in outlaws—an outlaw who was unafraid to acknowledge his profession to the law; an outlaw with a well-developed idea of humor. Sales, in spite of his crooked face, had a strong personality and Blaze wanted to know him better.

"You sure comes to a strange place to make your complaints," grinned Blaze.

"No use goin' to a saloon or grocery store, is there?"

"No-o-o," drawled Blaze, "but yuh see we've kinda made up our minds to chase every outlaw out of the country."

"Zasso?" Sales shifted his tobacco and squinted at Blaze. "Well, I'm bettin' that you'll make one —— of a stagger at it, Carlin. You look to me like the kind of a whipoorwill what will do somethin' except talk.

"I reckon you classes me with the rest of 'em, which is right and proper, but I ain't goin' to run 'til I has to. I'm willin' to tell yuh that neither me nor none of my men will ever shoot yuh in the back. Mebbe we'll give yuh a run, face to face—mebbe not. I know the order you've put out, but I'm askin' yuh to let me keep my gun, 'cause yuh might need it."

Blaze smiled into Sales' crooked face and nodded.

"I reckon you can hang on to your gun—for a while."

"Much obliged," nodded Sales seriously and walked out.

Blaze did not understand what Sales had meant, when he said that Blaze would, or might, have need of his—Sales'—gun. Blaze had no desire to take Sales' gun, in spite of the fact that Sales was notorious. Sales did not look, act nor talk like a fighter; yet the man in the restaurant had rated him above Black Mora.

Blaze leaned against the doorway, watching the street. Wolf Butte was beginning to warm up to the afternoon round of pleasure. A fist-fight was in progress farther up the street and the closely packed audience were cheering and jostling for a closer view. The creaking of a wagon caused Blaze to turn his head.

Coming up the street was a mismated team of mules, hitched to a wagon, on the seat of which sat a woman and a little girl. The woman's face was hidden by a sunbonnet, but Blaze could see that the girl was a pretty, tangle-haired thing, frail as a flower. The woman drove the team to the front of a store, where she tied the mules and went into the store.

As she started into the door, two men came out. They looked closely at her, and one of them went back and peered inside. He spoke to his companion and they both laughed as they went back inside. Blaze wondered why they had watched her. He knew that she had not spoken to either of them as she passed.

Blaze shut the office door and walked to the store. The woman was leaning on a counter, talking to the proprietor. The two men were standing near her, looking down at the child, which was clinging to her skirts. Blaze heard enough to know that the woman was crying. The two men looked closely at Blaze, but he gave them only a glance. The proprietor glanced past her, his eyes filled with pity. Then he put his hand on her shoulder and said softly:

"Mrs. Wheeler, go over to my house, will yuh? My old woman will be mighty glad to see yuh and you're welcome to stay as long as yuh like—you and the little girl."

The woman made some reply and turned around. She did not look at Blaze, but he could see that she was both young and pretty; but her face was gray from suffering.

"Just tie the team to the gate," called the storekeeper. "I'll see that they are taken care of."

The woman nodded and went on. The two men lounged out behind her and stood in front of the building until she drove away. The storekeeper shook his head wearily and turned to Blaze.

"Carlin, my name's Delaney. I was out there last night with the judge."

Blaze held out his hand.

"Glad to meet yuh. What's the matter with the woman—if it's any of my business?"

"God knows it is, Carlin. That's Mrs. Wheeler—Jack Wheeler's wife. Lives down on Cactus Creek, where they was gettin' a good start. Honest man was Jack Wheeler and he was one of our organization. Quiet, sober, minded his own business. He—wait a minute."

Delaney turned away to sell a man some tobacco, but came back to Blaze when the man had gone.

"Last night or this morning the vigilantes took Wheeler out of his home, Carlin. There ain't a tree within three miles of there. Know what they done? They tied his grindstone around his neck, like you'd rope a stone to a pup's neck, and drownded him in a deep pool.

"One man was guardin' Mrs. Wheeler and the kid, but he got interested in the murder and she and the kid got away. They hid in some weeds and heard the guard get cussed for lettin' 'em get away. The gang hunted until daylight, but gave it up and went away. As soon as she was able she hitched the mules and drove here."

"Reckon they wanted her?" queried Blaze.

Delaney nodded slowly.

"I reckon so, Carlin. Women—her kind ain't plentiful."

"Drowned like a pup," muttered Blaze slowly. "Delaney I don't reckon that —— is fit for the man who would do a thing like that. Don'tcha think the devil's got a little honor left? Where does the soul of a man like that go to, anyway?"

Delaney shook his head.

"I dunno. Mebbe they'll come back to Wolf Butte. It's beginnin' to——"

Came the dull snap of a pistol shot. Blaze rushed to the door with Delaney right behind him. A scattered bunch of horsemen threw up a dust-cloud in the middle of the street, which prevented Blaze from seeing just what was going on beyond them.

Out of the dust-cloud came a man, running, looking back and swinging a pistol in his hand. Suddenly the running man jerked sidewise, stumbled and fell sprawling, while from beyond him came the crack of a rifle.

The horsemen drew aside. Down the street came Frenchy, running carefully, the Winchester held in both hands. Straight to the fallen man he went. He picked up the man's pistol, shoved it inside his belt and came straight toward Blaze and Delaney, ignoring the man he had shot.

Men ran into the street and picked up the disabled outlaw, taking him into one of the saloons. Frenchy had a smear of blood across his cheek and blood was running from the back of his right hand.

"De sonn-of-a-gonn, she's fool me!" he panted. "She's have anodder gun inside de vest. Ba gosh, I'm get dat gun, jus' de same. Dis new gun be de good wan, Blaze."

Frenchy trotted back to the stable, while curious eyes followed him. He had hit a running man—running through a dust-cloud, at a hundred and fifty yards, and with one shot. There was something sinister about a man who could shoot like that and then ignore his victim, except to collect his pistol. It savored of an Indian killing for a scalp. Wolf Butte had become serious regarding the new sheriff.

Delaney had been watching the men carry the fallen outlaw away and now he turned to Blaze.

"Carlin, I haven't a bloodthirsty spot in my soul, but I could do a scalp-dance right now. That was Buck Law, Bill McKeever's pardner. Buck is part Shoshone. McKeever is one of the worst killers in the territory and he'll sure be dancing Dit-teau's hair when he hears of this."

Blaze smiled.

"Frenchy's hair is on kinda tight, Delaney. He's got the biggest heart in the world, Frenchy has. If you told him about the Wheeler family he'd be bawlin' like a calf. Can't stand sufferin', somehow—not when it's women and kids, but he does love a fight. If yuh ever see him goin' into action, watch him close. He's fast with a gun —fast as a streak, but it's the speed of a fox.

"Didja ever see one of them magic fellers —sleight-of-hand? Yuh did? They ain't so fast, Delaney, but they makes yuh look at somethin' else while they does the trick. Frenchy is always doin' somethin' just ahead of his draw. I saw him do it when he shot Jim Clell.

"He said to Clell—'You leave your gun with me,' just like that, and all the time he had his left hand half-closed, shufflin' his fingers like he was goin' to crumble up somethin' and throw it at Clell. Clell kinda talked like a man in his sleep, tryin' to watch that hand and Frenchy's other hand too. Clell went for his gun, but it was too late. His motion was made like he had just happened to remember it and Frenchy beat him a mile."

"They tell me that you *sabe* the six-gun yourself," observed Delaney.

Blaze smiled and shook his head.

"Not too well. I need an even break, Delaney. I hate to shoot a man. It always seems to me that it ain't right to cut a man off. When a feller fights his way up to my age, sufferin' things and enjoyin'

things and just livin' along it don't seem right for a man to cut him short with a pinch of powder and a pellet of lead. I wonder if anybody deserves it."

Blaze shook his head and continued:

"I reckon it's got to be done though, and I also reckon that Fate wrote in the big book that me and Frenchy Ditteau was to come here and make a clean-up. I hope the big book has more pages about us after this chore is done."

"I sure hope so," nodded Delaney. "I sure do, Carlin. I reckon I'll get some of the boys to go down there and help me bury Jack Wheeler. His wife dragged him out of the creek and put him in the house."

"My ——!" exclaimed Blaze, "I—I reckon some men deserve worse than a pellet of lead—and I won't feel sorry if I have to pull the trigger."

BLAZE turned and walked back to the office. As he walked up to the door a bullet whistled past his face and thudded into the casing. From across the street came the muffled thump of a pistol shot. One of the three front windows of the Eureka's second story was open, but the cheap, print curtains were drawn together.

Blaze whirled on his heel and went straight toward the saloon, walking swiftly. He was deadly cool, ignoring the chance of another shot. This was no time to back down; no time for anything except swift action.

Blaze had not reached the door, when another pistol shot seemed to jar the building, but no bullet came his way. He walked inside. Men looked at him, but it was evident that none of them in the big room connected his coming in any way with the pistol shots. The room was in an uproar, as two men quarreled over a misplaced bet on a roulette combination, and it is doubtful if any one in the room had heard the two shots fired upstairs.

Blaze walked straight for the stairway, which led to a balcony. The second story of the Eureka was not divided off by a ceiling from the lower floor, but was a rectangle of rooms leading on to a balcony. Blaze trotted up the stairs and had just turned toward the front rooms when a man stepped out of a door on to the balcony. Blaze stopped and his hand dropped to his gun. The man turned his head and slowly closed the door, then turned to face Blaze.

It was Chuck Sales. Had Sales fired the bullet which almost hit him? Blaze touched the butt of his pistol ready to draw, but Sales made no move toward his gun. He glanced over the balcony rail, looking over the crowd. He lifted his head and smiled at Blaze.

In spite of himself Blaze smiled in return. There was something contagious about that humorous smile, the lop-sided nose and the face overbalanced with the enormous chew of tobacco. Sales sauntered slowly up to Blaze, turned sidewise and lifted his right elbow, disclosing a heavy Colt gun which was shoved between his belt and body. Blaze lifted it out and glanced at it. One shot had been fired.

"He made a mistake," said Sales softly. "Good shot he was, but he had to shoot left-handed. Never shoot a snake to cripple it, Carlin, 'cause yuh must remember that yuh got to kill it to ruin its fangs."

Sales walked slowly around to the stairs and went down into the crowd. Blaze shoved the gun into the waistband of his pants and watched Sales go to the roulette layout and buy chips.

Blaze knew that there was no use going to that room. Sales had killed Mex Free; there was no question of that. Free had hid up there and tried to kill Blaze, shooting with his left hand. Blaze remembered what Sales had said about the need he—Blaze—would have of Sales' gun.

A couple of dance-hall girls came out of a room next to the one Sales had been in. They stopped at the door and looked at Blaze, as if afraid, but Blaze smiled at them and they walked past him. To Blaze, a woman was a woman, no matter what else she was, and he lifted his hat and bowed as they went past.

One of them giggled foolishly, but the other stared at him for a moment, turned her painted face away as if embarrassed and went down the stairs. She was not a young woman, but there were traces of former beauty in her face in spite of the glaring rouge and the penciled lines. Blaze remembered her. She was the woman who laughed, when he hit Black Mora with the beer mug.

He went back down the stairs and out through the crowd. Frenchy was walking toward the office, carrying his rifle in the crook of his arm, and Blaze crossed to meet him at the door.

"Somebody she's try to mak' fool from me," grinned Frenchy. "Nobody come to de stable now. I'm t'ink somebody's tell about me—Frenchy Ditteau. Ho, ho, ho! One feller she's git mad for me, Blaze, and she's talk bad. I'm tie her up and teach her de sof' language. Frenchy Ditteau she's hedg-u-cate, ba gosh!"

Blaze told him of Free's attempt to kill him and Frenchy listened open-mouthed to Blaze's tale of Chuck Sales' assistance.

"I'm hear from him," nodded Frenchy. "De stableman she's talk about Sales. I'm t'ink dis Sales be sonn of a gonn for fight."

Blaze told him of the Wheeler family, and at the finish of the tale, Frenchy's whiskers quivered with anger.

"De leetle kid, Blaze? His papa drown wit' grandstone? De man what do dis mus' be find. Firs' de cripple ol' man killed, den de hones' papa. Frenchy Ditteau she's on war-path, ba gosh!"

A group of horsemen rode past the office and swung over to the hitch-rack near the Square Deal Saloon. Riding in the lead was Black Mora, his ape-like shoulders hunched, looking neither to the right nor left. They tied their horses and clattered into the saloon.

Blaze stood in the doorway watching them go in. Several men came out of the Eureka, among them being Chuck Sales. One of the men spoke to Sales, who nodded and started for the Square Deal. Blaze turned to Frenchy.

"Black Mora and his men just went into the Square Deal, Frenchy. Chuck Sales is headed for there, too."

"Ba gosh," chuckled Frenchy, "I'm mak' t'ink de grizzly git fed quick now. We go dere, Blaze."

They crossed the street and went in behind Sales. The men who had been with Sales went in behind them.

Black Mora was leaning on the bar, a glass of liquor in his hand, listening to a man who was telling what Mrs. Wheeler had told Delaney. It was one of the two men who had followed her into the store. The man was finishing his story and imparted the information that Delaney was going to take care of the woman and little girl. Black Mora shrugged his shoulders.

"Why do you tell me these things?" he asked sourly and threw the glass of strong liquor full in the man's face. The man staggered back, his arm across his face, as if warding off a blow.

"Wimmin and kids don't interest me none!" growled Mora. "What do I care a —— about——"

Mora turned his head and looked full at Sales. The crowd drew away, expecting serious trouble. This was the first time that Sales and Mora had faced each other, and every one knew that there would be blood spilt when they met.

Sales was smaller than Mora, yet Sales was by no manner of means a small man, compared with the other men in the saloon. Mora's face was half-smiling insolently as he looked at Sales, but Sales' crooked face did not lose its indifferent expression.

Then Sales spat deliberately on Mora's boots. It was an unforgivable insult, yet Mora did not move. The smile faded from his lips and his eyes drew down to mere slits. Mora knew that Sales was a killer—knew that to reach for a gun would be suicide. His eyes shifted down for a fraction of a second. Sales was smiling now, his tobacco-satined teeth showing through his upcurled lips.

"I killed Mex Free, your best man," said Sales softly, ominously. "He kicked like a chicken with its head cut off."

Still Mora did not move. His eyes shifted for an instant, as if seeking a chance to get out of this encounter. Then Sales laughed.

"I've got yuh, Mora. I could kill yuh before yuh could move. My men are behind your men, Mora, and they can't help yuh none. You need help, Black Mora. Want to run the country, eh? You big bully! You're scared of death right now, but I'm not goin' to kill yuh—yet. You're bigger than I am, Mora, but I'm the better man. Take off your gun and fight like a man, you lousy, mud-colored coyote!"

It was unthinkable. Black Mora swayed away from the bar, licking his lips. His face broke into a wolfish grin. Mora had fought with his hands and knew something of his own strength; knew that he could crush an ordinary man, as a grizzly crushes a sheep.

A buzz of wonderment from the crowd. Was Sales crazy? Frenchy stepped in front of Mora and held out his left hand.

"I'm tak' de gun," he announced. "I'm collect now."

Mora's hand had dropped to his belt-buckles, but now he stopped and stared at Frenchy's face, then at the hand before him which was opening and shutting nervously. He hesitated. Would he give up his gun to the sheriff? His hand jerked nervously away from his belt-buckle as he looked at Frenchy's hand. Others watched the hand, but Blaze watched Frenchy's right hand, which had gripped the butt of his pistol, ready for a draw. Then Mora shook his head.

"All right. I don't care a —— who takes it."

He handed Frenchy the belt and gun, little thinking how close he had come to missing his fight with Sales. Blaze stepped forward and faced the crowd.

"Gents, this is going to be a fair fight. When a man goes down the other stays off and gives him a chance to come back. They fight only on their feet. Understand?"

Sales, stripping off his shirts, flashed Blaze a look of gratitude. It gave him a chance against this ape-man. Men threw chairs and tables aside, clearing a large space. Word of the battle traveled fast, and in a few moments there was a steady stream of men trying to claw their way inside to see the fight.

A man offered big odds on Mora, but there were no takers. Nobody considered that Sales had a chance.

"He can't reach Mora's head!" yelled a voice.

"Put Chuck on a chair!" yelled another. "We want to see what he looks like."

The men stripped quickly. Mora was even more ape-like, stripped. His body was corded with muscles and his skin was a deep bronze. Sales was broad of shoulder, narrow of waist and hip and his muscles were small compared with those of his antagonist, but Blaze noticed that Sales' muscles were long and supple, while Mora's were corded.

There was no time lost in preliminaries. Mora was ready first, moving to the center of the cleared space. His head was hunched forward on his short neck, his big hands opening and shutting as he waited for a chance to wipe out the insult.

Sales sized Mora up and then shot a glance around the room.

"Come on!" growled Mora, like a hungry bear.

Sales laughed and stepped forward, slightly crouched, both arms swinging easily, hands half-open. His long muscles rippled easily with the swing of his arms. Mora stepped to meet him and quick as a flash Sales slapped him across the mouth with his open hand. The blow had been cat-like in its speed and it cut Mora's lips. Before Mora could recover, Sales slapped him across the bare chest. It was as if Sales was playing tag with him.

Mora cursed and launched a mighty blow at Sales, but it passed over Sales' head, cleverly ducked. Men crowded closer, muttering. This was not according to their calculations, but there was no cheering.

The two men were circling each other now. Blaze noticed that Sales kept a perfect balance, while Mora seemed more clumsy, top-heavy. Mora swung again, a wide sweeping smash. Sales blocked it with the point of his elbow, catching Mora's swinging arm between elbow and wrist. It seemed to take all the power from Mora's arm for a moment, and Sales shot a straight right to his mouth.

Mora retreated slowly, his face contorted with rage. Then he sprang forward like a tiger, seeking to circle Sales with his long arms. Instead of evading them, Sales lunged forward to meet the attack. Sales' right hand flashed forward and upward, with the weight of his body behind it, and buried itself at the point of Mora's breastbone.

The circling arms slithered weakly off his shoulders, as Mora lopped forward from the waist, staggering blindly. By superhuman effort he kept his feet, but his swaying face was a green mask of agony, his mouth stretched wide for air.

Sales moved swiftly, uppercutting with both hands to Mora's face. Measuring his distance, keeping pace with the backward moving Mora, he smashed in short-arm uppercuts, with the regularity of a machine; uppercuts which did not paralyze, but cut and bruised. Sales was marking Mora for life.

He drove Mora through the crowd until he backed him against the wall. Then Sales set himself for the final punch, while Mora, sobbing, slobbering, tried to cover his face with helpless arms.

But the final blow was never struck. As Sales swung forward, a heavy bottle whizzed across the room and crashed against his head. Sales dropped like a log and over him fell Mora, blubbering for mercy.

For a moment there was silence; then the crash of a pistol shot. One of the men who had been standing on the bar, went backward, clawing for support. He had thrown the bottle and some one in the crowd had seen the deed.

Came the crash of breaking glassware, as he plunged behind the bar and the tense crowd went hog-wild. Sales' men were out for blood and Mora's men were willing to accommodate them, but the pistol was of little use in that close-packed place.

Men drew their guns and swung them overhanded, clubbing the barrels against anything which might come before them. Bottles flew crashing against the walls; sometimes against heads. The wide doors were not wide enough to accommodate the stampede, so windows were smashed to make exits. Blaze had flung himself across Sales, shielding him from the trampling feet, while Mora's men strove to fight their way to Mora's side.

Blaze managed to get to his feet, holding Sales' limp body, but was buffeted aside by weight of numbers. He clung to the inert body with one hand, while he clubbed his way through the crowd with his heavy six-shooter. Above the roar of the tumult came Frenchy's voice.

"Hol' on, you —— fools! Hol' on! De sheriff say stop!"

But that crowd knew no authority. Blaze fought his way to the front door, while Mora's men managed to get their leader and half-drag him out the back door. Bullets began to fly as soon as the clans were separated sufficiently to tell which was which. Mora's men got him out of the door, but they had paid toll.

Three of his men did not get to the door and as many more were stretched on the floor, downed by pistol barrels or thrown bottles. Four other men, whether Sales' men or otherwise, were also *hors de combat.* The shooting stopped when Mora's men disappeared.

Disheveled men staggered around in the street, clothes half-torn from their bodies, bruised and bleeding. The saloon was a shambles, furniture wrecked, mirrors shattered. Blaze staggered across to the office carrying Sales, while behind him limped Frenchy, talking French so fast that he fairly spat words as a machine gun spits bullets. Frenchy's hat and shirt were gone and his hair seemed to rise up like the roach on an angry grizzly bear.

Blaze placed Sales on a cot and dashed a dipper of water into his face. Sales blinked painfully and opened his eyes. A man, bruised about the face and minus one sleeve of his shirt, came into the door and looked at Sales. He spat out through the aperture of missing teeth and tried to grin. Sales looked up at Blaze and then sat up on the cot, feeling tenderly of the swollen cut on his head.

"How do you feel, Chuck?" asked the man.

Sales squinted up past his crooked nose at the questioner.

"That's a —— of a question to ask," grunted Sales and then looked up at Blaze and asked—"Did I lick him, Carlin?"

"Yuh did, Sales—yuh sure did and yuh licked him fair. Where did yuh learn to fight like that?"

"Back East. I was a prize-fighter once. That's where I got this lop-sided nose.

"What happened after somebody hit me?"

"I got the bottle-thrower," said the man. "He was a friend of Mora. This here Carlin saved yuh from bein' tramped to death, Chuck. I tried to git yuh but I couldn't go no place in that millin' herd. I seen him pick yuh up and fight his way through. McCarty, Simpson, and Franklyn got hammered up a lot and Micky Shannon stopped a bullet, but I think they'll all pull through."

Sales held out his hand to Blaze.

"I reckon you went out of your way to do this fer me, Carlin, and I thank yuh to beat ——."

"I ain't thanked yuh for what yuh done for me over in the Eureka," smiled Blaze.

"Just came out even," sighed Sales. "'Pears like I can't never git nobody indebted to me, —— the luck."

Doctor Brenton worked swiftly probing for bullets and binding up cuts and bruises. There was not enough left of the Square Deal Saloon for the owner even to promise an opening within a week, so the regular habitués shifted their affections to the Eureka, the Double Cinch or the High Card gambling-houses.

THE fight was the subject of conversation and only seemed to add zest to the business of the night. Chuck Sales was a hero. He had accomplished the impossible. It was gossip that

Chuck was formerly a prize-fighter, of the then "bare-knuckle" school and he was favored of men; but Chuck wore his honors with the crooked smile and a bandage around his head.

Fights were started over the merits of the punch which had made Black Mora as helpless as a child. Men loaded with bad whisky demonstrated it upon their acquaintances, which caused many upset stomachs and not a little spilling of angry blood. Few men cared for fighting with their hands, preferring the more rapid methods which seldom ended in a draw decision.

Four of Mora's men had been patched up and went home, but two of them would never ride the ranges again. Only one of Sales' men, Micky Shannon, was unable to partake of the festivities and he would be riding again in a few days. Several others had been slightly injured in the mêlée. Luckily the fight was held at short range, which made it impossible to shoot without danger of hitting friend as well as foe, otherwise the toll would have been very much greater.

Blaze and Frenchy did not mix with the crowd, but stayed in the office. Both of them had received superficial cuts and bruises. There was no doubt that Black Mora would make reprisals if possible. He would have to do something desperate to wipe out the disgrace of that whipping, and his followers were likely in a mood to follow him on any undertaking.

Frenchy had talked so much during the day that his throat was weary. It was the first time that Blaze had ever seen Frenchy tired of talking. He lay stretched out on a cot, puffing slowly on his old pipe and staring at the ceiling. Blaze walked slowly up and down the small room.

On the table was a pile of weapons which Frenchy had collected that day and surmounting the pile was Black Mora's belt and gun. Blaze took it from the holster and looked it over. It was a single-action .44 Colt, with carved bone handle, depicting a running wolf. The figure of the animal was in relief. Below the animal was carved the initials, J. L. H.

"Black Mora packs another man's gun," observed Blaze, handing the weapon to Frenchy.

Frenchy exhaled a cloud of smoke and examined the gun, peering at the delicate carving.

"Somebody she's do plenty work on de handle," he observed, handing it back to Blaze, who replaced it in the holster.

"I'm t'ink any man's fool to put name on de gun."

Came a timid knock on the door, barely audible. Frenchy got off the cot and stretched his arms. From across the street came the sounds of dancing, singing, voices raised in shrill argument.

Frenchy stepped to one side of the door while Blaze lifted the bar, drawing the door to him. A woman stepped quickly inside and Blaze shut the door behind her. Blaze dropped the bar into place and faced the woman. It was the one who had laughed when he hit Black Mora, the woman who had turned away when he had lifted his hat to her on the Eureka balcony.

Blaze bowed to her and indicated a chair.

"Won't yuh set down, ma'am?"

The woman shook her head.

"No, I've got to get back quick, but I had to ask you something—something——"

She glanced quickly around the room as if afraid to talk. She was less than thirty years of age, but hardened and haggard from her profession; yet she appeared embarrassed. Beauty parlors were as yet unknown in the West and the women of the dance-halls had little time for more than a daub of paint, smeared in a grotesque imitation of the bloom of youth; their hair frizzed with curling-irons which were heated in the chimney of an oil-lamp, and decorated according to their own standards.

This woman's dress was sparkling with cheap bangles and reeking with perfume, which is supposed to dull the senses of uncouth men and lead them to believe that this "rag, bone and a hank of hair" is perfection personified.

"Ma'am," said Blaze, "I'm glad to answer a question if I can."

She hesitated for a moment as if thinking deeply.

"I heard a man talking about you today. I think he runs one of the stores. He said that you found a man who—who had been hung."

"Yes'm," nodded Blaze, "we did find one man thataway."

"At a little cabin in the gulch which leads to Cinnamon Creek?"

"Is Cinnamon Creek where Black Mora's ranch is?" asked Blaze.

The woman nodded and compressed her lips.

"I can try to describe the old man," volunteered Blaze. But the woman got to her feet with a gesture of dissent. She leaned on the table for a moment and then turned, with her back to the table, her hands behind her and looked at Blaze.

"You heard what happened to Jack Wheeler?" she asked slowly.

Blaze nodded.

"Ma'am, it was awful—it sure was."

She bit her lips as if to keep back the tears and walked back to the door.

"I want to thank you," she said softly. "Thank you for answering my question, and —and for taking off your hat to me."

She lifted the bar before Blaze could assist her and slipped out into the street. Blaze dropped the bar back into place and looked at Frenchy who had never spoken while the woman was in the room.

"Whatcha know about that?" wondered Blaze.

Frenchy whittled some tobacco from his plug and filled his pipe. He tamped the tobacco carefully and lit a sulfur match.

"Can't yuh talk?" asked Blaze.

Frenchy nodded his head.

"Sure, I'm mak' talk, Blaze, but first I'm mak' t'ink. W'at you suppose she's tak' Black Mora's gun for, eh?"

"Black Mora's gun?" parroted Blaze and stepped over to the table. The holster was empty.

"She's tak' it when she's back against de table," explained Frenchy.

"Why didn't you stop her?"

Frenchy puffed thoughtfully.

"Blaze, de woman no steal for de val-ue of de gun, ba gosh. De woman know some-t'ing. Mebbe she's need gun. Mebbe she's tak' Black Mora's gun biccause his gun be de handies', eh?"

"Suppose he comes after his gun, Frenchy? We ain't got no right to keep his gun."

Frenchy shook his head.

"*Non.* We got no right, Blaze, but I'm not worry. When Black Mora come for de gun, I'm mak' t'ink I'm kill Black Mora. Chuck Sales she's wort' while for de fight; Beel McKeever she's suppose to be big man, but I'm got not'ing against dem two out-law. I'm——"

A heavy hand banged against the door. There was nothing timid about this knock.

"Who's out there?" asked Blaze.

A voice answered, saying something about Delaney, the rest of it being drowned by the noise from the dance-hall. Blaze cautiously opened the door. A man was standing there, his face shaded from the light. The light was behind Blaze and Frenchy, which left their faces in the shadow.

"What was it?" asked Blaze.

"Delaney wants yuh to come to his house," stated the man. "The Wheeler woman wants to talk to yuh."

The man half-turned his head toward the dance-hall as he finished his message. Without a sound, Frenchy sprang through the doorway into the man, and both of them crashed to the ground. For a moment Blaze was stunned at the suddenness of Frenchy's actions, but sprang to his assistance. The man twisted and cursed, but the little Frenchman had pinned his arms.

Blaze removed the man's gun and they dragged him inside and closed the door. The man sat on the floor and stared at them. Blaze let the full light of the lamp fall upon the man's face. It was the man whom Frenchy had booted at Cinnamon Creek; the man with mouse-colored hair and empty eye-socket. He stared at them, wonderingly, his eye wide open with fright. It suddenly occurred to Blaze that Mex Free had been killed before telling Mora that the two men had not been burned in the ranch-house fire, and that this man did not know until now.

The man's forehead had come in contact with the ground, and a trickle of blood was running into his remaining eye, but he made no move to wipe it away. He seemed bereft of motion or understanding.

"I'm never forget de man I'm kick," stated Frenchy. "She's plant de trap, Blaze."

"Delaney wants to see me, eh?" asked Blaze.

The man looked at Blaze, but did not affirm nor deny the question. Frenchy leaned over the man, shoving his bearded face close and peering into the one eye.

"Who sent you to lie?" asked Frenchy harshly, but the man was dumb. His eye stared straight ahead, as if visioning the punishment he expected.

Frenchy stood up and looked at Blaze.

"W'at you t'ink, Blaze? Dis is Black Mora's man for sure. She's bring de message to come and see Delaney. Delaney never send him, ba gosh!"

Frenchy snapped his words as if anxious to get into action again. Blaze lifted a coiled rope from under the table and proceeded to hog-tie the one-eyed man, who made no move to prevent it. Blaze roped him as only a cowboy can do the job and when he was finished the one-eyed outlaw was as secure as knots could make him. Not a word would the man speak, not even a curse. He was taking no chances.

"Where you go?" asked Frenchy.

"Delaney's place. Know where it is?"

"No. Mebbe somebody show us."

THEY closed the door behind them and went across the street. The closed Square Deal Saloon made a dark spot in the otherwise lighted street. Two men met them as they reached the sidewalk, and Blaze recognized one of them as being the stable-man.

"Know where Delaney lives?" asked Blaze.

The man had recognized Blaze and Frenchy and gave them the directions in a few words. Delaney lived a short distance from the business section, back on the slope of a hill. Blaze and Frenchy did not go cautiously, for the reason that Blaze believed that if it was an ambush, the outlaws might mistake Frenchy for their messenger in the dark and give them a chance to find out what they were up against. A dim light was burning in Delaney's front window. They were almost to the door when a voice said—

"Good work, Blue."

Men rose up from behind them, men who were unseen in the shadows of the fence and who ringed Frenchy and Blaze from every avenue of escape except into the house.

"The house," whispered Blaze. "Smash the window if the door is blocked."

"—— yuh, I've got yuh where yuh won't kick fer a while," gritted Black Mora's voice.

Blaze whirled and fired at the figure which he thought was Black Mora, while Frenchy's pistol spat flame in the other direction. The bushwhackers were taken by surprize; supposing that one of the two was their messenger, Al Blue. Blaze swung his gun from figure to figure, firing as fast as possible, while Frenchy emptied his gun into the bulk of the men who were only a few feet from him.

Oaths and cries of pain mingled with the crashing of pistols. Blaze felt a bullet tear through the flesh of his left forearm, while another bit deeply across his shoulder. His gun was empty. Frenchy had ceased to fire for the same reason. Straight for the door they ran, crashing into it together and splintering the cheap latch. It was a narrow hallway, opening each way into larger rooms.

Blaze bounded back from the wall and threw himself against the door. Frenchy went to his knees and skidded almost into the right-hand room. For a moment Blaze held the door with his shoulder, but he immediately dropped flat, braced his feet against the bottom of it, while he calmly shoved cartridges into his empty gun.

Bullets splintered the door, waist high to a man, but none of them came low enough to injure Blaze. Frenchy reloaded as fast as possible and crouched against the wall out of line with the door, cursing softly.

"Didja get hit, Frenchy?" asked Blaze.

"I'm los' piece from my ear and git bullet in de leg; I'm t'ink one boot she's get irrigate from de blood. How you come?"

"Got a slug through my left arm and one through my left shoulder, I think. Can't shut my hand very good. We kinda busted up the meetin', Frenchy."

"Ho, ho, ho! I'm have de gran' time latelee. I'm never know dere be so much good time in de worl', Blaze. Where you suppose everybodee she's be? Where's Delaney and de female wimmin', eh?"

Blaze crawled away from the door, which swung ajar for a few inches. Into the other room went Blaze, crawling softly in the dark. One room was partly lighted with the smoking oil-lamp, but this one was in darkness. Blaze crawled slowly, reaching ahead as much as possible; crawling like a three-legged animal.

Suddenly his hand touched flesh. Like a flash his pistol barrel bored into it but there was no movement. Blaze reached out with his injured hand, not daring to take away the pistol, and felt tight ropes.

"Frenchy," he called softly. "Come here, Frenchy."

"Ba gosh, I'm come," whispered Frenchy, and came limping softly into the room.

"Light a match," whispered Blaze.

Frenchy lighted a match, shading it with his hands. On the floor lay Delaney, trussed with ropes, gagged with a dirty rag and with a hangman's noose around his

neck. He had been bruised about the head, but his eyes were open.

Blaze cut his bonds and ripped away the gag. For a moment Delaney was unable to move, but he struggled to a sitting position as the match flared out.

"Where are the women?" asked Blaze softly.

Delaney seemed unable to talk and when he did regain speech it was barely a weak whisper.

"Gone. They stole them. Said they'd hang me as soon as they got you, Carlin."

"Shake yourself," ordered Blaze. "Where have the women gone? Why did Mora's gang come here?"

"Mrs. Wheeler," whispered Delaney. "Black Mora wanted her. Those were Mora's men in the store when she came there. She knew it was Mora's gang that killed Jack. Mora killed him to get her. He knew she'd tell me who got Jack and Mora was afraid.

"I heard him send the message to you. Mora's face is cut to ribbons, where Sales beat him. He said he was going to hang us both to the same limb."

"He's got your wife, ain't he?" asked Blaze.

"We were all here when they broke in," whispered Delaney. "Mora grabbed Mrs. Wheeler."

Delaney got to his feet, mumbling to himself. Blaze moved back toward the front door, his footsteps muffled in the heavy rag-carpet. The oil-lamp was guttering in the other room, casting a yellow light over the walls.

The half-open door began to squeak, as some one shoved it gently from the outside. The sound of a husky whisper came to Blaze's ears. Blaze covered the edge of the door with his pistol. Suddenly a man's body moved into view, but before Blaze could shoot a streak of flame shot from Frenchy's gun and the man dropped to the floor.

"Ba gosh, you mebbe wait too long sometime, Blaze," said Frenchy softly.

They listened, waited. Outside came a shrill whistle and a moment later the sound of galloping horses. Blaze took a chance. He hurdled the man in the doorway and sprang into the yard.

By the dim light from the moon he could see men riding away. Two horsemen swung past him, coming from the rear of the house. Blaze emptied his pistol as the horses thundered past. One of the men cursed and fired back. Fifty feet beyond, the horses seemed to crash together and go down.

Frenchy and Delaney joined him. Blaze had watched, but could not tell whether the horsemen had gone to town or not.

"Mora gave up trying to get us," said Blaze. "He's taken the women with him, I think. He's lost too many men already, and he knows we are still alive. Look out for them two out there by the horses. They may have some fight left."

They separated and started for the spot where the horses had fallen. A few feet away, Blaze stumbled over the body of a man, which proved that Mora's surprize party had not worked out as he had planned. They found the horses—one dead, the other crippled, but there was no sign of the two men.

The three men stood there, undecided. Far away they could hear the music from the dance-halls, soft and as indefinite as the light from the fleece-covered moon. The saddle creaked on the crippled horse, as the animal started to move away. Far back in the hills a coyote lifted its voice in lamentation.

"Ba gosh, she's de peaceful night," breathed Frenchy. "I'm lak' to go to sleep, Blaze."

"How does the leg feel, Frenchy?"

"Not feel much. I'm not t'ink she's belong to me. My boot squash, squash all de time. How's de arm?"

"Can't lift it," said Blaze. "Weighs a ton. Buck up, Frenchy; we've got to get Black Mora tonight."

"She's a fact," said Frenchy. "We got t'ree good leg and t'ree good hand left, which mak' plenty fun, ba gosh!"

"My wife!" exclaimed Delaney suddenly, as if he had just awakened. "My ——, they've got my wife!"

He trotted toward the town with Blaze and Frenchy following painfully behind.

"Delaney got shocked, I reckon," muttered Blaze. "He's just rememberin' things, Frenchy."

"I'm kill, kill—" muttered Frenchy complainingly, as if talking to himself. "De bad-man mus' be kill biffore de countree she's good to live here."

Blaze knew that Frenchy was weakening from the loss of blood. His voice was

halting and his left leg seemed to drag. Suddenly Frenchy increased his pace and his voice boomed out:

"Ho, ho, ho! Ba gosh! All de time I'm mak' t'ink of de squash, squash inside de boot. To —— wit' de squash! First we git Mora, den we sleep. Ho, ho, ho!"

"Good man!" grunted Blaze, gritting his teeth over his throbbing shoulder and arm. "We'll clean 'em up, old pardner."

Frenchy stumbled and almost fell to his knees.

"Hurrah for ——!" he croaked drunkenly. "Who's afraid of de fire?"

Blaze steadied him with his good arm and Frenchy laughed foolishly. They reached the street and headed for the Eureka, passing the other places. Frenchy was weaving, stumbling, but Blaze helped him along.

INTO the saloon they went and men stepped aside to let them through. The woman, who had stolen Mora's gun, was standing on a platform, singing, but stopped when she saw Blaze and Frenchy, who came up near the platform. The violin quit in the middle of a bar of music.

Blaze faced the crowd, lifting his good hand as a signal for silence. The room stilled in a moment, except for the shuffling of feet. Frenchy was hunched from weariness, but watched the crowd, with his right hand near the butt of his gun.

"Men," said Blaze hollowly, "you know us. We're cleanin' up this town."

Sales was standing near the bar and now he moved closer to Blaze. From back in the crowd came a voice—

"Look out yuh don't drown in your own suds."

"Black Mora and his men stole two women and a little girl tonight." Blaze's voice was cool. "Black Mora is the leader of the cut-throat gang, who are posing as vigilantes. No man or woman is safe while his gang are alive."

The crowd received this statement silently. A man pushed his way to the front and faced Blaze. He was a tall, gaunt figure of a man, yellow as old ivory. His taffy-colored hair was matted and a long, greasy lock curved over his forehead and almost to the bridge of his nose. His eyes were cavernous and the light from the hanging lamps made deep hollows under his cheekbones. A yellow muffler around his neck seemed to increase the sallowness of his face. Blaze had never seen this man before.

"Talk to 'em, McKeever," urged a man behind him. Blaze knew that this was Bill McKeever, a partner of Buck Law, whom Frenchy had shot.

"Got gunned up and now you're lookin' fer help, eh?" drawled McKeever. "Bit off more 'n yuh can chaw and now you're huntin' fer sympathy. Well, yuh won't git a —— bit of it hereabouts. I ain't forgot Buck Law, and by ——, if yuh wasn't crippled——"

"It's my left hand, McKeever," replied Blaze coldly. "I use my right hand for shootin'. I've had plenty of shootin' today, but if you must have it——"

McKeever was moving as Blaze spoke. His hand streaked to his gun, drew swiftly, but his gun exploded into the ceiling. Blaze had shaded him just enough to send a bullet ripping through McKeever's knuckles, scoring his forearm and burning across the ribs of the man who had urged McKeever on.

The crowd split with a rush, but above it all came Chuck Sales' voice:

"Steady, steady! Carlin stopped him, gents. No use of any more trouble."

McKeever staggered back, nursing his shattered hand, cursing impotently, his nerve gone. Then Sales sprang to the platform, shouting:

"Listen to me, you bunch of mangy coyotes! Stay here and suck a bottle and be ——ed to yuh! Dance, you whelps, while that offspring of the devil runs away with good women. Me and my men ride with the law tonight, and when we come back we're goin' to help the sheriff do the rest of his washin'."

Seven men, including Blaze and Frenchy, followed Sales out of the saloon, plowing their way through the crowd, which split wide open to let them through.

"Horses are at the hitch-rack!" cried Sales. "We'll find enough to carry us."

Frenchy was staggering and Blaze put an arm around his shoulder.

"Keep goin', pardner," urged Blaze.

"Ba gosh, I'm go!" declared Frenchy weakly. "I'm go, but de legs she's forgit how to lif' up. I'm tired like ——, Blaze Carlin."

Sales and his men were ahead. Blaze

and Frenchy were passing the front of the deserted Square Deal Saloon, when Frenchy jerked to a stop and almost fell.

"You hear dat, Blaze? You hear de woman scream?"

"Keep goin', Frenchy," urged Blaze. "There wasn't no woman screamin', old pardner."

"I hear," declared Frenchy stubbornly, stumbling toward the door of the deserted saloon. "She's sound lak' somebody choke hoff de scream."

Blaze stepped to the smashed window, across which had been nailed strips of boards, and tried to peer into the blackness. There was moonlight enough to show that the back door was open, and against the moonlit strip of the rear door moved the figures of men.

Blaze turned to Frenchy, who was trying to see inside, and gripped him tight.

"Stand here, Frenchy!" he whispered fiercely. "Black Mora was sure we'd go to his ranch to find him and he's holed up in here, where nobody'd think to look for him. Maybe he was afraid we'd catch him in the hills, do you understand, Frenchy?" Blaze shook him by the arm. "They've got them women in there! If Wolf Butte went huntin' Black Mora, he'd be right here to raise —— with the town while we was gone. Do you know what I mean?"

"You t'ink I'm —— fool en-tire, Blaze?" Frenchy's voice was cold as steel. Dizzy and sick from loss of blood, yet his will was stronger than his flesh.

"You get Sales," ordered Frenchy. "We smash dis Black Mora, ba gosh!"

Blaze trotted up the street, where men were mounting horses at the hitch-rack.

"Sales!" cried Blaze. "Chuck Sales! This is Carlin."

"Here's a horse for you, Carlin," answered Sales.

"Wait!" panted Blaze. He stepped in beside Sales and told him what they had discovered.

"Tie your horses!" ordered Sales sharply, calling to his men who had already mounted. "Turn 'em loose—do anything, but hurry!"

None of them took time to tie their horses and in a few moments crowded around their leader and Blaze. Sales gave them the information in a few words.

"Be careful," he added. "There's two women and a little girl in there and we don't want them hurt."

"One is Jack Wheeler's wife," said one of the men. "She's fed me three times."

"I knowed Jack," said another. "They hung a grindstone around his neck and throwed him in the creek."

"Black Mora swore he'd steal her," declared Blaze.

"We'll split into two bunches," said Sales. Slim, you and Flack go with Carlin to the front where the sheriff is. The rest of us will go to the back. Give us time to get there, will yuh, Carlin? I'll let out a war-whoop when we arrive. They'll think I'm just drunk."

Blaze and his two men went down the street, walking slowly so as not to arrive much ahead of Sales and his men. They found Frenchy braced against a corner of the building. Blaze put his hand on Frenchy's shoulder and shook him.

"You t'ink I'm 'sleep?" growled Frenchy. "I'm tak' off de boot and pour out de squash, squash, and I'm can't get de boot on no more, ba gosh!"

"Stay with her, pardner," encouraged Blaze. "We'll go to bed when this here thing is over."

"De bed," muttered Frenchy. "Dat's de good word, Blaze, I'm tire like ——, but de work mus' be do."

From the rear of the building floated the eerie war-whoop, which Sales had promised as a signal. Blaze peered into the building just in time to see the door close, cutting off the moonlight from the rear. From inside came the dull thump of a six-shooter. Footsteps rattled across the floor and a man darted to the front window and then dropped to the floor.

"Get down!" he yelled, followed by unprintable oaths. "They're at the front, too!"

Another voice cursed feelingly and a bullet whizzed out through the half-boarded window.

"We've got yuh trapped," stated Blaze. "Yuh can't get away. Throw your guns out of the window and come out with your hands up."

But there was no response. The men knew only too well what it meant. There would be scant mercy for any of them and Mora's men would rather die fighting than on the gallows. Mora laughed mockingly. He was at the end of his rope, but would not admit it as long as he lived. Blaze grasped one of the boards and tore it off the window. Bullets splintered through the board, but

did no damage. Blaze ripped them all off, which left the large window unprotected.

"What's the idea?" asked one of Sales' men. "You ain't goin' in, are yuh?"

"May have to," said Blaze calmly.

"Carlin!" shouted Black Mora. "Do yuh hear me?"

"Go ahead," said Blaze. "Talk fast!"

"I've got two women in here," stated Black Mora. "I'll make a trade with yuh, Carlin. You let me and my men get out and get away and I'll give yuh the wimmin and the kid. Talk fast or the deal's off. We go free, or by —— the wimmin and kid git what you give us, *sabe?*"

"No gut," declared Frenchy weakly. "Don' trus' him, Blaze."

"Go to the rear and tell Sales to try to smash in the door," whispered Blaze to one of the men. "Tell him to hit it hard."

The man ran to the corner and circled the building. Blaze ducked below the window-sill and crept in close.

"Well, are yuh goin' to talk business?" growled Mora. There was a note of uneasiness in his voice, as if his nerves were badly worn. Blaze did not reply.

Suddenly there was a crash at the rear door, which threatened to tear the door from its hinges. Blaze shot upright, vaulted through the window and dropped flat on the floor. He had succeeded in attracting all the attention to the rear and not a man in the building had seen him come in.

The blows were shattering the door, tearing off the hinges. Pistols flashed and bullets thudded into the door, but the door was too thick for the bullets to injure the men outside, who were using a wagon-wheel for a battering-ram.

The pistol flashes momentarily lighted the place for Blaze, and he was able to locate the women, who were bound and sitting upright against the top of an overturned table. Blaze crawled to them, while Black Mora and his men expended ammunition against the door and cursed brokenly.

Blaze reached the women and touched one of them on the head to satisfy himself that he was not mistaken. "Go out the front!" ordered Mora. "That —— door won't last another smash. Jump out the window and take a chance. Those —— women——"

MORA stepped across the room, feeling in the darkness. Blaze was on his feet now, crouched in front of the women, and Mora's groping hands touched him.

"Who in ——?" grunted Mora.

Blaze clubbed his gun, striking at Mora's head with the barrel, but he misjudged direction and struck Mora's shoulder, eliciting a yelp of pain. Mora flung himself forward, encircling Blaze with both arms. As they crashed to the floor there came a sound of splintering wood as the door gave way, the shouts of men, the thudding of pistols.

Blaze went down with Mora on top of him, clawing, biting, striking blindly. Blaze drew up his knees as he fell, and was thus able to prevent Mora from reaching his throat. His wounded arm was caught under Mora's knee, and his shoulder came in contact with a table-leg.

Mora slackened his frenzied attempt to reach Blaze's throat and grasped Blaze by the knees, trying to throw them aside. Like a flash, Blaze rolled sidewise, landed on his knees and sprang to his feet. Mora clawed himself upright, cursing hoarsely. Outside a conflict seemed to rage, but Blaze and Mora had the room to themselves. Blaze had lost his gun and he knew that Mora must be in the same fix.

This thought was only a flash, for Mora dived into him again. Blaze smashed him with a right-hand swing, but Mora growled hoarsely and grappled Blaze around the waist.

Weakened as he was, Blaze was no match for Mora in this kind of fighting, yet he continued to drive short blows to Mora's already disfigured face. They crashed into an upturned chair and went down, fighting with tooth and nail. Mora's breath was sobbing into Blaze's ear and there seemed to be little pressure from Mora's left arm.

Blaze wondered if the blow from the pistol barrel had not injured Mora's shoulder. Blaze was almost exhausted, but he fought savagely. He managed to get his fist beneath Mora's chin, driving upward with every ounce of his strength.

Mora groaned and that groan was his undoing. Blaze laughed. He was a better man than Mora. Blaze laughed aloud, a wheezing chuckle. Mora blubbered a curse and tried to get his fingers around Blaze's throat, but Blaze tore his hand away and

ground the heel of his palm into Mora's nose.

Suddenly Mora surged away from him and started to get to his feet. Blaze laughed again and tried to revile Mora for being a coward, but his vocal cords refused to function. Very well, he would get up, too, and they could fight more. It was hard work, this getting up, but he managed to get to his feet. He struck at Mora, but Mora did not fight back. Mora almost fell out of the rear door, which was splintered and sagging. Blaze staggered after him, shoving Mora toward the rear of the Eureka.

Once Mora stopped and tried to go the other way, but Blaze struck him in the neck; struck him with a fist which would not stay clenched, and Mora whimpered like a beaten puppy.

The front of Mora's shirt was splotched with blood, where a bullet had ripped through the muscles, and there was a jagged furrow across his neck, where another chunk of hot lead had barely missed its kill.

MORA stumbled into the rear door of the Eureka. He stopped, but Blaze bumped into him, shoving him ahead. The room was in a turmoil.

Sales, pistol in hand, a bloody smear across his face, had his left hand twisted into the collar of a man and was holding him against the bar. Another man was lying on the floor, with Frenchy standing astride of him, his knees half-bent, mouth wide open, but still gripping his big Colt; dangerous as an old crippled wolf. Two of Sales' men were holding another man against a card-table. The crowd had given them plenty of room.

Straight ahead staggered Mora, head down and weaving like a wounded animal, while behind him came Blaze, scarcely able to lift his feet.

A group of dance-hall girls scattered to let Mora through. He came to a stop near Frenchy.

"By ——, he didn't get away!" croaked Sales.

Frenchy threw up his head and looked at Mora.

"Ho, ho, ho!" Frenchy's voice rasped weakly. "Tak' look, everybodee! De big one she's come to be judged!"

Suddenly a woman, the woman who had stolen Black Mora's gun, rushed past Blaze. She stopped a few feet from Mora, her right hand buried in the folds of her dress.

Her face was white with fury. Her penciled eyes gleamed green in the murky light, and her carmined lips were a thin, red line, barely discernible. For a moment she stared at Black Mora. He seemed about to speak to her, but she forestalled him.

"Black Mora, I've waited for you. You made me what I am because I was afraid of you, but I am not afraid of you now."

She brushed her hand across her brow as if to clear her thoughts.

"My old father—you killed him, Black Mora. He came to this country to kill you for what you done to me and you and your men hung him. He was old and crippled, but you feared him.

"You and your vigilantes! Ha, ha, ha! You told me you would run this country and that you would marry me. You wanted Jack Wheeler's wife; so you murdered him."

Mora's mouth was wide open and his breath was jerking from his lips, but no protest came from him. Cold fear gripped his heart. The crowd made no move. Blaze listened dully, as if to an oft-told tale, wishing that the woman would keep still so he could sleep. Frenchy was swaying on his feet, fighting to keep above the man, who had turned on his side and was staring at Mora, as if wondering if his chief could save him.

"You wanted power," continued the woman, without a trace of inflexion in her voice. "Power—women! Ha, ha, ha!"

Her lips barely opened to emit the cackling laugh, and the lines of her face did not change.

"Women, Mora. You didn't care what breed. You lied to me. You killed my father and stole his gun. Listen to me, Mora. You said that my voice pleased you more than any you ever heard. Listen to it, because it's the last voice you'll ever hear. My father's gun, Mora. His initials are on the handle. Jack Henderson, whom the Indians called Running Wolf. He carved his hate into those handles, but he loved the gun, because it was to kill you. Do you hear me, Mora?"

Her voice was almost a scream.

"I've got that gun, Mora! Pray—quick!"

Mora threw out his arm blindly. Blaze lurched to grasp the woman, but her hand came up swiftly, the skirt still covering the muzzle of the gun.

Just once it roared. Mora jerked back, seemed to collapse like a bundle of rags and crashed to the floor.

The woman dropped the gun and staggered back against the bar, her flimsy dress flaming. She screamed as Blaze grabbed her and swung her around. His ebbing strength flared up as his hand grasped her bodice and with one jerk he ripped off her gown and sent her spinning into the group of hysterical girls.

Blaze kicked the flaming dress to the center of the room. For a moment there was silence; then came a dull thump. Frenchy Ditteau had fallen to his knees, straddling his captive, clutching him with both hands.

"De job is done." Frenchy's voice was barely audible. "De bad-man she's all t'rough in Wolf Butte, and I'm ver' tire' of de squash, squash——"

Frenchy slid forward across his man, face down. Blaze tried to go to him, but the room whirled. In a dull sort of a way he seemed to feel hands grasping him and carrying him away. It seemed good to move without effort.

Suddenly the hands seemed to release him. His body stiffened to take the shock, which did not come. Then he opened his eyes. He was in a strange room. Across from him he could see another bed, around which a blue cloud seemed to hover.

He tried to move, but his left side seemed to be bandaged tightly. After a moment's reflection he lifted his head. A man was standing at a window, while another was humped over, sitting in a chair.

Footsteps were coming up the hall. The man got out of his chair and went to the door. For a few moments there was a whispered conversation. The door closed and the man came toward the foot of the bed.

It was Chuck Sales. He glanced at Blaze and a glad smile lighted up his homely features. He dropped a heavy object on a table and came quickly to the head of the bed.

"Carlin," he said, "I'm danged glad to see yuh with your eyes open."

"Ba gosh!" came an exclamation from the smoke enshrouded bed across the room. "Blaze, are you 'wake up?"

"Hello, old pardner," called Blaze weakly.

The other man came to Blaze. It was Judge Whalen. He looked down at Blaze, a glad smile in his eyes.

"Yuh might tell me about it," suggested Blaze.

"Doc Brenton told me to keep yuh quiet," stated Sales, "but I don't reckon a little tellin' is goin' to hurt yuh any. Them women wasn't hurt none and Mora's gang is completely wiped out. Wolf Butte is tamed, Carlin."

"Do yuh mean that?" queried Blaze. "Did all that killin' do any good?"

The judge picked up the small table and carried it around to where Blaze could see it. On it were at least twenty pistols. Sales lifted the top two and smiled down at Blaze.

"These two just came in. There ain't nobody down there to make 'em give up their guns, but they're all doin' it. I'm takin' it upon myself to look out for you two, but I wish you'd hurry up and git well.

"A few more days of this civilized town and I won't have a horse-thief left to follow me. You fellers sure did put one awful crimp in my business."

Sales walked back to the window and the judge sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Carlin, you can't realize what you have done," said the judge softly, and then added—"you and Ditteau. It will be years before Wolf Butte will be anything except a border-town, but it will be an orderly border-town—a town where good men and women may live in peace. You took the only method of making it change its ways, and—well, we won't try to thank you."

"You're welcome, judge," said Blaze simply.

"I'm sure had one gran' time—me," stated Frenchy. "Nobody she's have to t'ank Frenchy Ditteau, ba gosh, biccause I'm enjoy everyt'ing, you bet."

"You fightin' son of a gun!" laughed Sales and pointed out of the window. "Here comes more artillery. Reckon I better git my gang and drag out of here before a preacher hits town."

Blaze grinned contentedly and stared up at the ceiling. He had done something for the country—something worth while, and he was glad.

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

WHICH of you were torpedoed? A word from Lloyd A. Kohler concerning his story in this issue:

Junction City, Kansas.

I have used a new group of gobs this time—the crew of a cruiser, which I have named the *Wichita*. Of course, I don't even claim to be a master of description, but I have tried to make the sinking—torpedoing—of the *Wichita* a true picture, for I have not the slightest doubt that among your readers are many of the crews of some of the ships which went to the bottom during the late war with Germany—the crews of the *San Diego, Jacob Jones, Cassin, Antilles, Petrolite* and many others. If there are, and the story is published, you may be sure I'd like to hear a peep from them.—LLOYD A. KOHLER.

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FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, B. M. Adams, or Bill Adams as he wants us to call him, rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. As in the case of a good many others of our writers' brigade, it is also his first story in any magazine, but there are more to come. Those of you who have followed the sea—even more those who followed it in days gone by—are, I think, going to *feel* the sea when you read Bill Adams' stories.

I don't often venture any comment when a new member of our writers' brigade introduces himself, but I want to say that I like and honor a man who states his creed simply and manfully. The weak-kneed fear of ridicule has done more than most other things to squelch the good that is in all of us and keep it from coming forth into the world boldly and unashamed. The world needs it.

Lindsay, California.

The Camp-Fire Gang,

Dear Friends: Life is apt to be a queer jig—and at times a man's feet get a trifle weary. One sometimes falls to wondering what it's all about anyway. Isn't that so?

You ask me to tell you something of myself? What is there to tell? Here goes. May it not spoil your appetite or ruin your beauty sleep.

WAS brought up by an old maiden lady who had me lined up for the ministry. My parents were gone—or practically so. For my father

was a soldier of fortune and a man of many wide travels and adventures, rarely at home. At an early age I went to sea aboard a four-mast clipper and with her had the joys that all sailors come by, more or less. Hunger, thirst, hurricane and calm. The old sea—who, I need hardly say, is a hard mistress and especially, it often seems, to those of her lovers who love her most truly—broke me and cast me aside.

Since then I have been many things: A broken bum, a policeman, a preacher, always a not much account sort of a person. Today I am still young, a boy in heart and eagerness, and love for life. The old sea still cries to me with a siren call, and sometimes I go sit by her gray face and dream of the days that are gone. She will remain the same long after I am gone. And, even as her beauty and her dear loveliness will yet live on, I make no doubt but that all things worth while will also live—the dear things of life's short day obliterated in a golden glow at sunset time.

TO ME it seems that life holds one thing that is well worth while—finer than the gauds of Cæsar and the baubles of the rich men's palaces—and that is the glowing little gem of friendship, which is known to some also as love.

I have known both poverty and riches. I have learned that poverty is of small account as long as one can play the old game with a grin.

I have a God. A God who believes in hard fighting in a valorous cause, and defeat taken with an undefeated smile by an unconquerable soul. There is no defeat. The Guards can die—they do not surrender. I speak high words—a weak mortal who knows all too well how hard it is to live by such brave words. But, since they are true, and since the bravest of us are but human and the frailest as fair in the sight of a true fighting God as are the strongest, I will once more brighten my tarnished old shield and step into the ring, encouraged by a word of friendship from an unknown face and by the young laughter of the lads who follow after us, watching to see how we lead.

THIS evening I do not feel much like talking. Beside me there hangs the picture of a clipper ship, and around her the faces of the well loved dead. The ship is gone, and so are they who sailed her. But in memory's eye the old flag still streams upon the wind of life's gray morning, and the old songs still echo down the decks at sundown time. There come to all of us times when we would rest a while in the crush of the battle—tonight is such a one with me. The rest will be the sweeter for the feeling that there are those besides myself who ken, as I ken, that love is the greatest of the old world's locksmiths—the holder of the last of all the keys that will open the door to all things in some far-off day.

Wishing you a breeze that will let you carry your three skysails day after day along the wide old sea of life, I am very sincerely—BILL.

P. S. My friends call me Bill. It is not my name. —B. M. ADAMS.

The following, in connection with his story in this issue, came to me with the story itself:

Enclosed little yarn of the good old days was written after I had a letter from my old skipper that said to me:

"You are the only one of the old crowd left. —— was lost overboard last month in the Channel."

The "old crowd" consisted of twelve young men who sailed forth together to learn to "hand, reef, and steer" many years ago.

The hero of my poor yarn was one of them. Should you care to look up past history you would find that President McKinley once sent to William Clegg (then second mate of a tramp) a gold medal for gallantry at sea—rescuing the doomed crew of a sinking schooner.

I have painted the end of Clegg as he would have chosen to have it had it been left to him to choose.

If my little yarn returns to me, as it doubtless will—well: I was reared to the tune of a head gale and a high head sea. And shall be able to grin and carry on.—B. M. ADAMS.

IN THE December 30 issue we printed the drawing of a cowboy riding a steer, asking you to say whether the unnamed artist was really familiar with the material he was handling. The picture wasn't drawn for the purpose of this test; it was merely one of several the artist showed us. There hasn't been time, at this writing, for answers to reach us, but if any considerable number come in, the results will be passed on to you at a later Camp-Fire.

Meanwhile, here are the facts, best stated by the artist himself, Ross Santee, who decorated his letter with the little sketch shown above. Doubtless you've seen his work of late in some of our best magazines and doubtless you'll see more of it.

Globe, Arizona.

I have worked in this country for about six years. I worked for the Bar F Bar Outfit and the Cross S. I was never anything but a horse wrangler. And he doesn't stand very high in a cow outfit. His relation to a top hand is much like the dish washer to the head cook in any first-class restaurant. He drags wood for the cook and acts as a sort of companion and head nurse to the herd of

saddle horses and pack stock that make up the remuda.

One Spring at the shipping pens the punchers were all sitting along the top of the pen, waiting to load. One of the punchers was sitting on the opposite side, talking to an inspector. I never knew what the inspector asked, but as he nodded toward me, I heard the old puncher say, "Who? Him! ——, no! He ain't nothin' but the horse wrangler."—ROSS SANTEE.

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HERE is a word from Farnham Bishop that should have reached you in the December issue along with the story in question:

Berkeley, California.

"The Deacon's Seventy-four" is based on the amusing and amazing exploit of the English privateer *Mentor*, of Liverpool, which was built by an amateur shipwright who had her thrown back on his hands and put to sea on his own account with a scratch crew. They fell in with a huge French East Indiaman, the *Carnatic*, which had been so cunningly camouflaged as to scare away every one else. She was the richest prize ever brought into Liverpool. Baker, the *Mentor's* builder and owner, became Lord Mayor and built a fine house which was promptly called by the local wits "Carnatic Hall." That was in 1778. I transposed the episode to the War of 1812 but it was really an English, not an American, exploit.—FARNHAM BISHOP.

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DRAWING letters out of our Camp-Fire cache, I find I've somehow been missing a bunch of old ones that got off to a corner by themselves. Here's one written back in September, 1919, but just as good as ever:

Encampamento de Rincon,
Republica Domingo.

Yesterday, in the spirit of revenge, I resolved to expose these residents of our locality, their habits, their native instincts and inherent racial barbarity, because I became involved in an affair of clubs, slashing machetes, and flying rocks wherein my dignity suffered. That one should be called upon to arbitrate a dispute of such trivial dimensions, yet wherein death-blows counted as mere punctuations, is an affront to the white man's standards of personal importance.

Perhaps revenge is not the proper spirit of this exposé because since my arrival here my nerves have been ridden and trodden and stamped upon by these people. In fact, this letter was begun some time in August as a sort of exhaust to my slowly mounting wrath because some time between the daylight and the dawn, after tossing and struggling for some six hours to sleep, I was almost unnerved by the grand finale of the dusky dancers as they brought the all-night dance to a brilliant finish. The tom-tom boomed its final note, the bamboo flute squealed its final squeal, the jazz implement scratched its final screech and the dancers, bursting forth in rapturous, curdling yells of delight, clinched my threat to tell tales on these images of ineptitude. Thus this letter.

FIRST, mountains, swathed with mist and rainbows, traversed by dizzy trails cut by foaming rivers and torn by jagged cañons, thatched by dark and moldy jungle and drenched by sudden roaring rain-showers. Second, a village of rude, palm-thatched huts, wherein the laborers reside, planted upon the hillside and continually threatening to slide down the muddy way; the main trail, that coquettishly flirts with the landscape, stepping lightly into the river because of the mud or sometimes clinging to the hillsides because of the river that suddenly deepens to worse than floundering pools of liquid mud. Third, my shack with its modern shower-bath roof and pet spiders; and then in the front yard you will find the beginning of Section No. 5 of the highway that is being constructed to traverse the *Republica*.

This section after a few false starts and diverse windings above the River Jima, enters into a discouraging swamp and disappears southward toward the capital. Further than "disappears" I can not say, because beyond that point one comes to the land of *mañanas*, huge luscious *mañanas* filled with the succulent, oily nuts of promise. Already have I become impregnated with that enthusiasm and so will say, just continue, or *mañana*.

MODERN road machinery has no field here; the time is not yet ripe. The ancient and reverend pick and shovel are here the tools of progress and huge-muscled, savage brutes to wield them are the exponents of success. Rock, solid rock, falls away before the constant blows and tiny blastings which are controlled by engineering problems until a road begins to shape itself where a mountain goat would hesitate to graze. Little did Columbus think, as he trudged along the old Indian trail through the mountains, that some day Africans would build a road where his armor-clad followers had trodden, and that these Africans, who are now modern Haitians, would be imported into Santo Domingo to labor.

This island is composed of two republics, Santo Domingo and Haiti. And the natives, like oil and water, do not mix. In the prehistoric time and until this century they mixed, but now have bitter memories of the mixture. The Haitians are a distinct people in these parts, and are rather proud of it. Their history is filled with bloodshed, conquest and politics. Being descendants of the old French slaves, their mannerisms and training are very French. Their attitude toward foreigners is one of absolute equality. Since the time when Napoleon, being hard pressed in Europe, could not send reenforcements to his forces in Haiti and the slaves arose and wiped out their masters, their descendants have claimed that they licked old Nap. himself. And in consequence are quite a cocky tribe of persons.

Association with the white man has brought them wariness and guile, but they retain their old superstitution and indolence. For 80 cents a day they can produce more inaction than can a sun-dial. As for superstition, Mark Twain's *Jim* was a man of no consequence at all.

THUS we have a highway that has been for some years under construction and as many more yet to look forward to, if the labor question is not solved, because enough labor can not be concentrated. Thus the road is the dilemma of its engineers. Revolution and graft until these times,

the problem of childish strikes, petty racial combats, and Nature's obstacles, present themselves constantly for solution.

But what is that to Father Time or the lizards who bake themselves upon the macadam between the showers? Why hurry when according to axiom all things come to end? Why fret? The hillsides abound with nourishing plantains; why disturb the foliage with the swarthy pick and shovel? To spin a little raw cotton, to roll a leaf into an aromatic smoke, to urge on your game-cock, are moments that enter into the life of each man. Why haste and thus shorten the span of delicious days? One does not live forever, *señor*, and it is much more profitable to loll in one's doorway and watch the world ride by.

BUT returning to the Haitians. Their language is French as she should not be spoken. Their delivery of the same sounds not unlike an untuned harp—music, but mostly discords. Their clothes are but shreds of modesty, their shoes are two-inch callouses and their temperament is in keeping with their attire—very natural.

When they are not quarreling they are singing, or watching with savage yells of delight a huge rock that has been pushed over the side, bound and lunge down to the rushing river.

Their songs are very pleasant, and one can get the atmosphere of darkest Africa in the savage undertone. The shrill tones of their women when singing their "*Ay, Ay, Ay*" voodoo chant above the *thud-thud* and *boom* of the drums is enough to bring the ghost of Rider Haggard's "*She*" to the spot. And at early morning, before gray has disturbed the stillness of night, the wordless song of the workers can be heard going along the stumbling pitfall trail above the roaring river. Their quarrelings are works of art. To describe one requires too much setting and stage property—*i. e.*, a steam-calliope, a dozen dogs suddenly gone mad, a sprinkling of evil-eyed gods, a trio of whirling dervishes, and an erupting volcano. Their belligerent gestures are supreme. With one fell swoop they will wipe you off the map, burn you to a cinder with a glance.

But it is singular that after a few moments of near-murder the twain will walk on, the best of friends. Or at other times they will turn to listeners and "carry on" for hours or visit friends with the quarrel still at no settlement.

Sometimes a quarrel lasts for several days. Distance lends no hindrance to the debate. They will howl and bark at one another across the entire camp, and get no attention whatever from the residents. Yet at other times you will see two men look at one another; then swift action follows, clubs, rocks and curses until one of the fighters is on the retreat, for death eventually is the result to one if both are of equal bravery.

THEIR code of honor is quite difficult to understand; the intricacies of their domestic affairs are insoluble. I saw one gentleman strike his wife across her breast with a fence-post and with such generosity that she is now absent. Yet he undoubtedly had several wives and was probably dickering for another. Verily is a woman allotted her place.

One man returned one evening from labor and found that each of his five wives had eloped. Gentlemen, his wrath was a poem of chagrin. For hours he stalked about his lean-to of grass like an imprisoned lion. He raved, he called to Heaven, he stamped in majestic threats of vengeance. His infuriated tirade awoke a million devils within his breast, and his outpourings of threats and curses actually brought the froth to his lips. For two days he stalked, half-crouched like a lion. Then he seemed to forget his complaint entirely and soon blossomed forth with a new bride.

But on the other hand, Cecilia, the queen of the camp, came in one day after a long and muddy trek from Haiti in search of her husband. She found him. Within a few moments this woman, six feet tall and built like a steel safe, had chased away the three new wives and beaten up her husband. But she has abandoned him and lives a lonesome life now, because her prowess has made her unduly famous.

THE ancient law of the jungle circulates here; in their lives the gentle word holds no sway. Clubs and fleetness of foot are the main factors of their existence. But the process of civilization is creeping in. Since they discovered that the U. S. Marines could see in the daylight and shoot as well, they have not looked askance at the word of the white man. But first Christianity will have to be substituted for voodooism.

Voodooism is, as far as I can gather, the worship of gods, trees, tin cans or whatever may attract the fancy. It is practised constantly, harbored and fostered by their priests and banned by the authorities. The tools of a priest's power may consist of a blue bottle filled with green beans, or a snaggled tooth, a bone or anything a boy would not trouble himself about. His eloquence is of incantations about the moon, or the devil waiting behind a toadstool, or a ghost lingering near the pile of rotting logs. His gestures are mysterious passes over the head, guttural noises, sobs, hisses and groans. But the expression in his eyes gets me; a wild-eyed lunatic eying his keeper is far more gentle. There is a green luster of insanity shining forth.

PRIOR to a "camp meeting" they prepare foods of various conglomerates, tighten up the tom-tom and then send forth the word that at the dark of the moon the dance will be on.

Within a sweaty little hut they gather. Packed to a degree of suffocation yet allowing a certain space about the food, where the priest and lone danceress perform, the sinners await the opening chords. The odor of chicken blood and uncertain garlic crowds the space between the dripping bodies that glisten with the feeble lights.

Suddenly without a preamble the affair is launched. With a rattle and a boom the ceremony begins, while outside and peering through every available crack, the unlucky followers strive to follow the leader.

A chant begins. The women in chorus, sway and swing to its shrill, plaintive notes. The men, with their low guttural voices, pound a steady undertone of savageness. The music-makers seem to live their savage rhythm. The tom-tom is expertly fingered and thumped, giving out rapid, locust-like, heavy throbbing, that is accentuated by the sudden startling thuds of heavier blows. The glass bottle, thumped end downward, gives out a hollow human sound, and the dry hard bones rattling together cultivate the suggestion of motion. During this chaos of sound an old hag shuffles about the food, blesses it, pours sacred water upon it, stirs it with

a saintly stick until at a certain stage the sounds cease, when the gang falls to and devours it.

THE second movement then begins. The motif is more humble but more deadly, for during a long, slow, monotonous dirge the undertones of the drums carry the suggestion of concentration. With their eyes glued to the spot where the food was, the worshipers begin to move—a slow solemn shrugging. Soon this movement grows into spasmodic hops, which then develop into a serpentine dance. The ritual is now sung.

By that time, I suppose, the eaten food begins to ferment the spirits and supernatural qualities so fondly imagined, because an added luster and vigor come to all. The drummers bend mad efforts to their instruments while perspiration streams from them. The old hag lifts her voice to a diabolical screeching. The dancers assimilate the excitement and lend themselves to autosuggestion. Then, when they have aroused themselves to the proper dergee of hypersensitiveness, they begin to see the little tin gods numbered among those present.

Some one extinguishes the morgue lights and the fight is on. The rhythm of the dancers breaks; they jump, hop, lunge, roll about, fall headlong into fits, stamp through the fire-brands, rub the burning embers over their bodies. They scream and rave. They groan with the madness of seven devils. Then when the flesh can stand no more, the remaining conscious ones fall exhausted, and the dance is voted a huge success.

A real dance, high up in the mountains and unwitnessed by unbelievers, partakes of human sacrifices. They still do it.

PAY-DAY is one of festivities here. All are bedecked. Feasts, dog-fights, and board-bill collecting are the main events. Unheralded, a real man-scrap often breaks out. But the old boarding-house mistress trying to collect a past debt furnishes the constant sport. She, on the whole, is quite a real person and an expert at throwing the club. A man will retreat before her onslaught like the mist before the morning—he simply fades away, to the amusement of the villagers.

At night the modern game of craps is introduced. And the uproar is terrible. Dogs get underfoot, strange women wander about, spicy smells of sweets and putrid food befog the air. High laughter and bantering are flung to all corners. Then the jazz band begins to tune up for the 48-hour dance. The band consists of five instruments—a goat-hide tom-tom, a tambour, a three-note bamboo flute, a groaning machine and a gourd notched and grooved like a file. (Over those creasings is passed a bit of steel, and the resulting sound is like sandpaper vamping. It's a real jazz instrument.)

The flutist, by the aid of the three notes, produces "Tipperary" in quite excellent style, as you may imagine. And other technic displayed is superb.

To the strains of the exquisite music the bullies desert the gamblers and wend their way to shuffle, shamble and shimmy. By the whites of their eyes, the width of their smiles, their swaying and swinging you may witness their joy as the delicious tones grate upon the bedlam of dog howls.

The fluter will flute, the tommer will tom, and the groaner will burst forth at unexpected intervals with a curdling groan, while the rasping gourd puts the jazz into the air.

And the dancing. Heavens bless us! What a movement of rapture, what ecstasy of motion! Folks, truly, we are still in the dark ages of the terpsichorean art, for while we are dallying on the verge of the naughty shimmy and other promising steps, here are those motions and wiggles.

A FEW days ago I was doing some estimating about six kilometers from the camp. At noon as I was lunching upon a box of crackers, word was brought to me that my presence was required a short distance on, where the Dominicans and Haitians were fighting. When I learned that a real scrap was going on, I grew interested and so, tucking my machete under one arm and munching the crackers, I proceeded to the scene of action.

A sudden turn brought me slam into the neatest scrimmage this side of no man's land. And believe me when I say that a fool rushes in where an angel fears to tread, because I strolled into a mêlée of rocks, whirling clubs and slashing machetes, raging men and women, clawing and scratching, clubbing and slashing, and flying about like a swarm of mad hornets, crazy mad with hate.

One of my assistants clinched with a Haitian and tried to secure his enemy's weapon. That woke me to the fact that as my body-guard was into the fight and I was a stranger in their midst I was liable.

I aroused me to action, still eating the crackers. Stepping grandly upon a stump and arranging my garments of dignity, I gave vent, several vents, to loud and crackling words of !!?—!!—.

The box of crackers was too much for them. One valiant child saw, and ceased his strivings for murder. To witness, in midst of their fighting, a certain amount of crackers being calmly consumed was beyond their grasp. Thus, at the psychological moment, my box of crackers became the cynosure of the combatants. And instantly, as I realized the value of my strategical position, I assumed command and waved the heroes to opposite side. Between them I flung my machete point down into the earth as a moral deadline.

With this royal scepter before me and munching the dry bits of flour, I held court of appeals. Kaiser Bill was not more regal, Woodrow was not more eloquent, and Blackstone not more legal. My comments upon their equal bravery was tactful to a degree. My logic that to kill one another when there was work to be done and that some one else would collect their wages was a point of distinction. And thus in a moment I bade them bind up their wounds, pick up the fallen and peace be unto them.

Can you imagine my feeling of importance when I learned that the cause of this brawl was but a little minnow not over two inches in length that had been stolen?

And further, can not you sense my indignation when but a few moments ago word was brought into camp that at the other and upper camp the same bullies and a few chosen friends were settling scores?

It seems that my remedy was not a cure, because Cecilia, the queen of the camp, has just been brought in, unconscious. And as each new courier comes in for medical treatment the tale is added to. They are having a glorious, gory time. The maimed and vanquished that dribble in are met and consoled by their friends, who wish that they also had been invited.

But Cecilia, that Amazon, that bully and beater-up of man, has met her Waterloo. Her fatal beauty

is marred, her disposition is changed. She, the tower of aggressiveness, has been humbled to meekness. It is reported that she was enfolding, like a boa constrictor, a man, when she received a blow from behind—sort of a rear attack. As she turned about to engage the wielder of the club she received a handfull of stars and comets between the end of her impudent nose and her eyebrows.

And now that I have revenged myself I shall retire, hoping to sleep soundly and for once not hear the burro's serenade, or the dogs disputing, or the four-o'clock chiming of the roosters, or the lusty awakening of the bachelor who sleeps under my shack, or the war-cries of the black legions wending to labor after the final boom of that infernal tom-tom when the brilliant, fashionable pay-day dance is terminated.

The romance has been taken out of engineering since Richard Harding Davis departed, and since that time engineers have to sleep so that they can hit the grit and slop through the mud. But it is well to have the poetic eye to sort of kid yourself along with.—WILLIAM R. THOMPSON.

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LONG ago Uncle Frank Huston gave me an Indian name, Iwodake-Ape-Itancan—Talking Leaf Chief, which of course is Indian for editor. That didn't make me a real Indian, but it admitted me to good company. Henry Herbert Knibbs, of our writers' brigade, is *Ni-Tap-i tupi.* When I asked Uncle Frank about these names he forwarded my letter to Mr. Knibbs, who wrote me as follows:

Chief Talking Leaf:

*Kola! How Kola!*

A Talking-leaf has come to my lodge from an old chief who says: "Tell Chief Talking Leaf your name in the Blackfeet tribe, how you got it and who gave it to you and what it means."

In Arizona, in the White Hills, is the lodge of Api Kuni (Spotted Robe of the Blackfeet), known to palefaces as James Willard Schultz. His lodge is called Apuni Oyis—Lodge of the Butterfly. Near it is another lodge which I was the first to inhabit, built by Api Kuni that I might bring my squaw and hunt with him, many moons ago. That lodge he named I-tam-i-pi Oyis, or The Lodge of Happiness, possibly because my squaw and I have hunted, fished and ridden the high mesas much together, like men companions. After many days of hunting together, Api Kuni named me Ni-Tap-i tupi, which is, in Blackfeet, "Real Person."

I should like to believe that I am all that Api Kuni thinks I am.—HARRY KNIBBS.

E. E. Harriman also has an Indian name, but he'd get sore if I told it, though it was given in honor and without thought of a joke. Anyhow, his name is in the Arapaho tongue.

Captain Dingle is now Ate-Minne-Tepi, or Chief of the Water-House.

Buck Connor, also of our writers' brigade, is a Brulé Sioux by formal, regular adoption. One day I received the following letter. The pipe was eventually to go to the National Museum at Washington and the risk of keeping it on our office walls seemed to me too great, so after showing it to everybody within range, I sent it at once to the Museum.

Hollywood, California.

Iwodake-Ape-Itancan: I am sending you for the walls of the Camp-Fire Teepee a real honest-to-goodness relic from my people—it goes forth by this same mail.

This relic is a Lover's Flute from the Brulé Sioux. It was played by my adopted father (Wagalexa Conka) Big Turkey to win his late wife during the encampment of the Sioux at the signing of the Black Hills Treaty in Wyoming. It is made of hollowed cedar tube, with the holes burned in it; then it is painted in blue earth paint and wrapped with buffalo sinew and covered with a green buffalo intestine. The block is placed on it with the nitch and tin fitting close and wrapped with the cord which you will find in the hollow of the tube. *Mitca Cola, Nitawa.*—WAGALEXA CONKA (BUCK CONNOR).

I confess that, though we tried hard, none of us in the office could qualify as a lover and flutist, and one of the others could play a white man's flute at that.

Uncle Frank, though he has never seen them, calls my wife the White Sage and my little boy is Chaska. Here is what he says about his own name:

I am in Teton Sioux Ta-sunka-nanji (pronounced Tu-shunka-Nazhe), but at first Cheyenne and Arapaho called me Wo Witasu, or The Whirlwind. I had several other names at times (like all others), but more generally known as Standing Horse.—UNCLE FRANK.

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INCIDENTALLY, it may seem as odd to some of you as it did to me to find how much wild life there is close to New York, the largest city in the world. Take my rocky little farm 50 miles north of New York City. Fox, 'coon, woodchuck, skunk, cotton-tails, deer, partridge, pheasant, weasel, loons, gulls, squirrel, trout, bass, lake trout, large and small mouth bass, white perch, pickerel. I've a stuffed bob-cat shot a few miles away a few years ago—not by me. All-year protection in New York State on deer and out on Long Island they have become a pest and are bad enough near us—they and the rabbits playing havoc with fruit-trees, etc. And some —— fool introduced jack-rabbits, which are so bad that the county north of ours offers a bounty on them.

Far better hunting and fishing than where I

came from in central Ohio, even at that sadly earlier day. Pretty good for 50 miles from New York City, isn't it? And you don't have to go 50 miles to get it, either. My place is really nearer 40 as the crow flies and, on either side of the Hudson, you don't have to go that far.

MR. NOYES butts in to say that that's nothing—that bears, bulls, lions, goats, coons, frogs, guineas and sharks are plentiful right in New York City itself. Mr. Noyes is always spilling the beans like that and there go the rest of the gang digging out more of the same—geese, skunks, foxes, lizards (lounge), snakes (parlor), lambs, weasels, shrimps, jackasses, mules, zebras, vampires, crabs, clams, lobsters, suckers, chickens, bugs, hogs, eels, curs, hounds (hootch and tea), pups, hens, gophers, gorillas, Elks, Moose, Eagles, tigers (blind), leeches, loons, gulls, hawks (night), stags, bucks, owls (night, stewed and boiled), pigeons (stool), boas, vultures, buzzards, secretaries, birds (snow), snipes (gutter), dogs (hot), greyhounds (ocean), canaries (kitchen)—and all that kind of thing. They've even got as far as links (cuff and golf), bores, mayors and dears. There are even more and worse, but the above will give you a look-in on the trials of an editor.

HOWEVER, getting back to real animals, in order to have a more nearly complete list, I asked Raymond S. Spears of "A. A." to help me out, which he very kindly did. Here are his letter and the list:

Little Falls, New York.

I enclose slip of wild life found around New York—I don't think it is anywhere near complete, especially among the game birds. Some on the list are rather rare, as Canada lynx, the little brother of the cougar, and big brother of the common wildcat. And I don't know for sure about the kit fox.

I happened to see a hair seal that was killed in the Hell Gate explosion in East River, about 1886—so I know that. And I rowed into a school of porpoises in a Long Island bay (Huntington) so I know them. Also caught young sharks there—but somebody else will have to go into the sea-monster business.

A MAN could have good sport shooting those big Norway dock rats, anywhere along the water-front, on the piers, if they'd let him, using .22 pistol or rifle with BB caps or shorts. I've seen mink, muskrats, weasels, lots of the ducks, squirrels, etc., around New York, and wild geese lettering the sky out at Rockaway Beach strand. Used to kill sparrows with a beanshooter—and by the way, these birds are flocking into the country, because city streets are kept so clean by auto traffic.

Blackbirds make fine potpies, four-and-twenty, for the king, you'll remember. A .36 gage shotgun No. 10 shot for them; I have one!

I didn't try to list the shore birds. I don't know much about them, but Eaton's "Birds of New York" (N. Y. State Museum, Memoir 12—Vols. 1 and 2) covers the observations so far as known of feathered visitors.—R. S. SPEARS.

**Mammals**

*Rodents:* Squirrels—red, gray, fox and flying; chipmunk; woodchuck—red and black; porcupine (lost man's grub!); muskrats; cotton-tails—gray rabbit; hares (great northern and southern varying); beaver (Catskills?).

*Plantigrades:* Bear, raccoon.

*Feline:* Wildcat—bay lynx; lynx—Canadian; cougar (stray, Catskills?).

*Mustelida* (weasels): Ermine, least weasel, mink, skunk, otter, marten (possible), pekan or fisher (possible).

*Of the sea:* Whales, hair seal, porpoise, sea otter (just possible), sharks, etc.

*Deer:* White-tail, red (English importation), roebuck (imported).

*Marsupial:* Opossum.

*Fox:* Red, gray, kit(?), Sampson (mongrel).

**Feathered**

*Swimmers:* Merganser, American—red-breasted, hooded (rare); mallard; blackduck; gadwall (rare); widgeon; teal—green wing and blue wing; shoveler; pintail; duck—wood (growing rare), canvasback, American scaup, lesser scaup, ring-neck, bufflehead, old squaw, American golden-eye, harlequin, Labrador (rare), American eider, King eider (rare), American scooter, white-wing scooter, surf scooter, ruddy; geese—greater snowy, blue, American white-front, Canada, Hutchins, white-bellied brant, black brant, barnacle; grebes—Holboell, horned, pied-billed; loons—walloon, black-throat, red-throat; puffins, jaegers, gulls, terns, etc.; petrels, shearwaters, etc.; rails, curlews, plovers, sandpipers.

*Upland game:* Grouse—ruffed, Canadian (Catskills—doubtful?), prairie (nearly exterminated if not quite); quail; English pheasant (imported); woodcock.

*Herons:* Great blue, green, bittern least, black-crowned night, ibis gray, glossy.

*Raptores:* Eagle—golden, bald; hawk—sharp-shinned, Cooper, red-tailed, red-shouldered, American sparrow, marsh, pigeon, Swainson, broad-winged, American rough-legged; Peregrin falcon, American Osprey; American goshawk; vulture—turkey, black; owls—barn, long-eared, short-eared, great snowy, screech.

Next time you think of the biggest city in the world remember that, however bad it may be, you can pretty thoroughly escape from it in an hour or so by auto, train or trolley. In "A. A." this issue, Mr. Spears has something to say about camping near New York.—A. S. H.

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**These services of *Adventure* are free to any one.** They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

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Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

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In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

## Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

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(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

# Ask Adventure

**A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.**

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelop is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

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**2. ★ The Sea Part 2**
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P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

**25. Central America**

EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

**26. Mexico Part 1 Northern**

J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

**27. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California**

C. R. MAHAFFEY, Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions.

**28. ✠ Canada Part 1**

S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**29. ✠ Canada Part 2**

HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**30. ✠ Canada Part 3**

GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**31. Canada Part 4**

T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

**32. Canada Part 5**

ED. L. CARSON, La Connor, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

**33. ✠ Canada Part 6**

REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**34. ✠ Canada Part 7**

JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**35. Alaska**

THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

**36. Western U. S. Part 1**

E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

**37. Western U. S. Part 2**

J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas and Oklahoma. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

**38. Middle Western U. S. Part 1**

JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially early history of Missouri Valley.

**39. Middle Western U. S. Part 2**

JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

**40. Middle Western U. S. Part 3**

(Editor to be appointed). Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

**41. Eastern U. S. Part 1**

RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks; automobile, motorcycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating; river tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

**42. Eastern U. S. Part 2**

HOWARD A. SHANNON, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Va.—Motor-boat and canoe cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and tributary rivers. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water-fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

**43. Eastern U. S. Part 3**

HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

**44. Eastern U. S. Part 4**

DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

## WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

**A.—All Shotguns,** including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

**B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers,** including foreign and American makes. D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

**C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

## FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

**Salt and Fresh Water Fishing**

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and advice; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

## MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. Arthur Bent, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)
✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

## STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agrl., Com and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Comm., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

### Mr. Thompson Explains

IF IT so happened that some of you "Ask Adventure" correspondents wrote Mr. Thompson and failed to receive a reply, here's the explanation. Write him again if you're still interested, and this time you'll get your answer for sure:

Somehow (Mr. Thompson writes me) I wish there were a means of my apologizing to some inquirers, whoever they are. I was away ten days, so naturally unanswered mail accumulated. With instructions to clean up, the maid destroyed everything, even the MS. of a new book on fishing I had just completed. So I am up in the air as to who the inquirers were, and it embarrasses me greatly. I hope nothing of the kind again occurs in a lifetime.

### Around the Mexican Oil-Fields

THIS inquirer wants to go to Tampico on his nerve. Well, Mr. Mahaffey did it, so it can be done; but these tips, which Mr. Mahaffey gained by hard personal experience, may pad the bumpy spots some:

*Question:*—"I am writing requesting information concerning Mexico at this time, especially the regions surrounding Tampico on the Gulf.

I am intending to go there very shortly and would like to know something of this country before I start.

1. Could you give me an idea of how working conditions are for a young American down there at the present time?

2. How is work in the oil-fields now?

3. Is there any chance for a young man to get on with companies that are sending their men down?

4. Would there be any chance for a man who has handled machine guns and understands explosives to get a job as a guard, or be able to still see a little excitement and real adventure?

5. What are the wildest parts of Mexico, where one can still see plenty of real excitement, etc.?

6. I can not speak Spanish at present. Would it be much of a drawback to attempt to enter that country without knowing it?

7. Is there any way one could make money there, that is generally known if they do not care for risks?

8. Is there any mining property owned by Americans, that they employ guards for?

Would rather these questions would not be published, or rather not my name in *Adventure*."

— —— ——, Grandfield, Okla.

*Answer*, by Mr. Mahaffey:—1, 2. Since the slack times have commenced in the U. S. there have been many Americans and other foreigners drifting into the Tampico oil-fields; and on account of dull times in the mines, due to the low price of metals, many foreign employees have probably gone there, thus making work scarcer than usual. I would not advise any one to go there on a speculation without having sufficient funds to carry him a month or two, and as Tampico is a boom town everything is high.

3. Unless you are a specialist in oil-well work, refining or such, I do not think you could get sent down as these companies can pick up semi-skilled labor in and around Tampico. Also, the man on the ground naturally has the first chance.

4. I do not think so, as it would cause great friction and trouble to employ foreigners as guards, etc. The best chance for excitement and adventure would be as a paymaster in the oil-fields, and I assume they are heavily bonded. They usually get all the action they want, as they carry payroll money to outlying camps and have skirmishes at times with the bandits.

5. The wildest part of Mexico, as far as I know, is in the Sierra de Oaxaca, in the State of Oaxaca, south of Mexico City. There are many unexplored localities and some wild and woolly Indians. In the States of Michoacan and Guerrero there are large jungles, etc.

6. Unless you know Spanish, or at least enough to get along, it would be rather difficult to travel in the interior, although all over you will meet people who can talk some English. However, the first time I came to Mexico I had two dollars and could talk just three words in Spanish. I stayed two years, made money, spent it, had a good time, adventures galore, including a stay of thirty-six days as a guest of the rebel party in control at the time in a hot adobe jail, and wouldn't trade the experience for a farm. It all depends on how big a chance you will take to go it alone in a strange country.

7. Offhand I could not tell you of any quick although easy way to make money, as there are opportunities differing with the time and locality, and one would have to be right on the ground. If you want to go in for speculation there are fluctuations in oil shares which offer a chance of making money and also of losing it.

8. I do not know of any mining concerns who employ foreign guards, and think it very unlikely on account of the reasons mentioned above. As those companies are in business to make money they will not as a rule hire foreigners at high wages when a Mexican will do it for less money. All these mining companies have their private police.

Tampico has about 20,000 inhabitants, is located on the banks of the Panuco River, and is six miles from La Barra or the Gulf. There are many wharves alongside of which steamers lie. The climate is fairly cool in the Winter-time, but in June the rainy season begins and it is damp and tropical. There are thick growths of jungle and brush all over the outlying country. There are a number of salt and fresh water lagoons, and the country is low and swampy, more during the rainy season.

There are many gnats and mosquitoes, and the most troublesome sickness is malaria. Take a two-grain capsule of quinin every day until acclimated, and this will ward off malaria. If you go down take as much stuff as you can such as light clothing, shoes and necessary articles, as all these are exceedingly high in Mexico.

If you have not taken out a passport you will have to do so. This is secured through the U. S. District Court or State Court authorized to naturalize foreigners. This will take you about three weeks to get and costs $10, and you will also need the visé of the Mexican consul at the border where you cross, another $10.*

The Mexican authorities are endeavoring to keep too many Americans from competing with the natives in the oil-fields, and if you cross without complying with the law they are liable to arrest you and deport you to the U. S. side, where the U. S. authorities will soak you for leaving the U. S. without a passport, the highest penalty being ten years or $10,000 fine. If you were wise to the country you could get away with it, but a newcomer might take a fall.

Do not indulge in too much fruit for a while, as the stomach, being unused to so much, gets out of order, thus weakening the system and giving sickness a chance. If you drink, do not hit the *tequila* and *mescal* too heavy until you are acclimated.

In order to learn the language and to get next to the country and people I would advise you, when you are located, and if it is possible, to rent a small house and get a Mexican for a servant or housekeeper.

From where you are the best way for you to get to Tampico is *via* Laredo, Texas, to Monterey, and from there to Tampico, *via* Victoria. The fare from Laredo to Tampico will be about $13 first-class and $6.50 second-class, or maybe a little more. Take good care of your baggage and suit-cases, etc., and do not leave anything unlocked or anything lying around as there are many people in Mexico who would carry off a red-hot stove.

I hope this little advice will help you, and I wish you luck. If you get to Tampico drop me a line, and if you want any other data do not forget to write.

### The "Buckeye" of Chesapeake Bay

NO, THE conversation is not about a misplaced native of Ohio:

*Question:*—"Can you give me some information regarding the 'buckeye' boat of the Chesapeake Bay? I understand that they are very seaworthy boats and fast sailers. That they have leg-o'-mutton sails, no bowsprit and raking masts without stays.

What is your opinion of a 30-footer (or near that) with a cabin, as a sea-going cruiser for two or three persons? Are they as easy to handle as a yawl of the same size? I have heard that they are.

Also, can one, or perhaps two, men handle it under ordinary conditions?

I would be very grateful to you if you can give me some little information about these boats, or any other type that you think best suited to my requirements, *i.e.*, approximately 30-foot length, sea-going qualities and ability to be sailed by one or two men."—CHAS. B. WOOD, Lehigh University, So. Bethlehem, Penn.

*Answer*, by Mr. Beriah Brown:—The bugeye or buckeye of the Chesapeake oystermen, as I recall it, is a small, flat-bottomed boat, double-ended and thus resembling a dory in some respects, but lacking the sheer of the latter and thus its seaworthiness. It is equipped with a couple of small leg-o'-mutton sails for use in favorable weather, but is usually propelled by oars. I can not imagine a boat of the kind being equipped as a sea-going cruiser, although possibly there have been some changes in the size and build of these craft since I was familiar with them, which was many years ago.

A craft of 30-foot length, of proper model and rig, would be a comfortable cruiser to be handled by two or three men. For a craft of that kind with a small crew, my preference is for the yawl or ketch rig, rather than for the sloop or schooner, as much more easily to be handled by one man.

### Trapping-Lands and Trapping Outfits

TOO late to start this year, and if you take Mr. Catton's tip you won't try it next year, either. One of the best things "Ask Adventure" experts do is to save inquirers from wasting time and money on expeditions that are foredoomed to failure. But it is interesting to read the real facts about a trapper's work and appetite:

*Question:*—"I should be very thankful both to you and *Adventure* for the information you may have about going this Winter in the woods to hunt and trap. My partner and I are both used to roughing it. We are accurate shots, have worked several seasons in the lumber-camps, and in a word we are no babes in the woods. What we'd like to know is where to locate so as to have a decent bit of territory to trap and not be crowded with other trappers; the cheapest way to get there and where to outfit for grub and what amount of each ought to get for a six months' stay. We have about $400 to outfit with. We have our guns and part of our traps, mostly all No. 1 and 1½, and expect we will need some bigger sizes too. What will a freight canoe cost us, and where shall we get it?

Any pointers you may give us in general will be thankfully accepted. We are out for business and sport. Can we make it pay?"—E. H. COURUAZ, Brockville, Ont., Canada.

"P.S.—I am 36 years old and my partner 25."

*Answer*, by Mr. Catton:—In answer to your question letter:

First, whether you can make trapping pay or not depends on a number of things. First, have you done any trapping, and do you know the game? Next, are furs going to demand a good price this Winter? I think not; in fact, from present outlook

* These regulations will probably have been changed by the time this issue is on sale.

raw furs are going to demand anything but a good price.

Thirdly, your trapping-ground must be a good one indeed these days to get much. You'll have to go north, quite a way north, too; or else west—the big-game districts of British Columbia at least. The Yukon district is still full of game, in spots, and there are sections of the Rocky Mountains still almost virgin territory. But the older provinces are pretty well worked out to make pay with furs at a low price.

Your No. 1 and 1½ traps are all right, especially if you have far to pack in with your outfit. Then a half-dozen larger size for the trap-robber and wolves, and build deadfalls for bears, and you'll be hooked up. Figure on the length of trap-line you are going to work and take three traps to the mile. Set two traps to the mile and save the third for losses and off-trail sets.

As for hunting, remember the game laws. And a pelt with a bullet-hole in it brings a poor price.

In the immediate vicinity of Algonquin Park is a good place near-by to set a line of traps; but it is pretty well lined out every Winter now. In fact, I know of no place aside from the far north and west where you could run a line of any length without crossing or paralleling another. To come down flat-footed with my answer to this question I will say, "DON'T." Don't expect to make any big money trapping this Winter unless you know the game from "sign" to market.

Outfit with grub at the nearest big town or village to your trapping-ground. As for what you will take and how much for two for six months, that is up to you. I've seen men sit down to a meal in the bush and eat for one solid hour, while others would eat one-quarter as much and feel better, keep in better health and do more work.

Then, too, tastes differ. What you would like maybe your partner would not like. The only thing to do in this case is to sit down and figure up with a pencil and paper how much you two will eat, and what you will eat, per meal, and then multiply. There are five hundred and forty meals in six months.

The actual necessities in grub are: Sugar, salt, tea, coffee, flour, baking-powder, oatmeal or corn-meal; salt or smoked pork (fat), dessicated or dried potatoes, and the same of other vegetables; beans, rice, raisins, split-peas; prunes and dried apples. Everything else will be luxuries and will cost money and weigh like —— in your packs.

Take fish-hooks and line, and don't be backward about eating off your trap-line. Few animals there are but are really fine eating if properly cooked. Beaver, muskrat, groundhog, 'coon, otter, bear and porcupine are all excellent meat, either stewed or baked.

A good freight canoe will cost you close to one hundred dollars, new; though you may be able to pick up a second-hand quite cheap. Where, I can't say. New canoes can be bought of Eaton's or any of the sporting-goods stores in Toronto.

Am enclosing leaflet with books marked that you would do well to purchase and take with you.

**"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.**

### Australian Gold Strikes

NUMEROUS and rich as they have been, undoubtedly many more remain to be made in the great unexplored interior:

*Question:*—"I would greatly appreciate it, if you could give me some information concerning Australia as a whole. Has the interior been explored or developed very much? Have gold or diamonds been discovered to any great extent? How is the climate? About what does it cost to go from either New Orleans or San Francisco to Sydney and the length of time the trip takes? Am enclosing stamps for reply."—C. H. OVERTON, care of *Adventure*, New York.

*Answer*, by Mr. Goldie:—The interior of Australia has attracted many intrepid explorers but still remains in a large measure an unknown quantity. That it is mostly desert or at least very barren country is known; but who can say what wealth it may conceal when it is remembered that Broken Hill, which was for so long regarded as a barren waste, became one of the richest silver-lead fields in the world?

The opening of the transcontinental railway within the last three of four years has opened up wonderful possibilities for the explorer or prospector, and it is the general belief of mineralogists that great discoveries remain to be made.

Gold has been discovered principally in the States of Victoria (Ballarat and Bendigo), West Australia (Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie, Great Boulder, etc.) and Northern Queensland (Mt. Morgan) though big finds have also been made in other places. In almost any up-to-date library you can find works dealing with the sensational gold discoveries of Australia. Diamonds have only been found in small quantities.

The climate in the big centers of population on the seaboard is much like California—in the interior like that of Colorado or Arizona. For full particulars as to fares and accommodation write to the Oceanic S. S. Co., San Francisco, from which city the trip takes three weeks.

### Camping Chances for the Gothamite

CRUISE around, and you'll find lots of places within easy commuting distance, Mr. New Yorker. See also what A. S. H. has to say in Camp-Fire about wild life right in the big burg's back yard.

*Question:*—"I will greatly appreciate it if you will furnish me with the information concerning the following:

1. A good camping site about 50 miles from New York City in the Hudson Valley.
2. If possible it should be near a lake or river, good for swimming and fishing.
3. How we can reach the spot, by rail or steamer.

Enclosed please find self-addressed envelop."—M. BIEGELEISEN, New York.

*Answer*, by Mr. Spears:—You have a very great variety of camping opportunities within fifty miles of New York City. Get a map of New York

State—Rand-McNally, say. Measure off fifty miles on scale up Hudson—brings you about to Garrison. It takes you two-thirds of way across New Jersey. It gives you Ramapo Mountains, Greenwood Lake country (big Summer resort, this lake), Long Island Sound, south shore of Long Island, etc.

To find what you wish, I'd suggest you go out on N. Y., N. H. & H. R. R. and look along some of the streams emptying into Long Island Sound. Get a chart of Long Island Sound—U. S. Hydrographic Survey, Washington, D. C. This will show bays and navigable inlets. On some small inlets you'll find what you want. It is a case of exploring, however. You can lease boat locally, or you could run up the sound in a motor-launch, ducking in and out along the Connecticut shore till you found a good little harbor—some very wealthy estates there, and then every man's creeks. You'll find chances for tenting, shanty-boating, in a hundred places, some salt, some fresh water.

I'd prefer the sound to the Hudson, as you'd find it cleaner. There are in northern New Jersey streams, ponds; also in the Catskills; also in western Connecticut. To find these, get index sheet U. S. Topographical Survey, from U. S. Geological Survey, Washington, D. C. Ask for N. Y., Conn. and N. J. index. Then buy the topographical maps, which show streams, ponds, mountains and towns, and practically all the buildings outside of corporate limits. These will show you places to visit exploring, salt and fresh water both.

You'll find countless camping-places available.

### The *Sea Venture* Commemoration

A BIT of history of especial interest to stamp-collectors:

*Question:*—"Quite likely the following questions are not in your line, but if you can give any information it will be deeply appreciated.

I am interested in stamp-collecting; and in that connection I have noted a recent issue of your island, known as the '*Sea Venture* Commemoration' series. What I would like to have is a short account of the aforesaid *Sea Venture*.

Please do not publish my name." — —— ——, Bayside, N. Y.

*Answer,* by Capt. Dingle:—The *Sea Venture,* more correctly the *Sea Adventure,* was the flagship of Admiral Sir George Somers, of Great Britain, in his voyage with a squadron of nine vessels to the new colony of Virginia. The fleet sailed in the Spring of 1609, with a complete equipment of men, women, implements and stores for the serious settlement of the new colony, for which a royal charter had just been issued.

The ships were scattered by gales, and perhaps the only ship's company that escaped final and utter disaster was the first ship's company to suffer shipwreck. This sounds like a Mick's metaphor, but it is literally true; for the *Sea Adventure* hit the reefs off Bermuda—the reef has ever since been called Sea Venture Flat—and became a total loss. Her people, however, were saved to the last man, woman, and child, and lived to colonize the Bermuda Isles for Great Britain.

This is why Bermudians issued stamps such as you mention. As America issued tercentenary stamps to commemorate the start of the new nation, so do most of the British colonies commemorate the beginnings of their own places in the world.

The heart of Sir George Somers is buried here in the old town of St. George's, within sight and sound, almost, of the breakers on the reef which made Bermuda a British colony.

No doubt you can add to the sketchy bit of data I give you by applying to your nearest library. Anyway, such as I have given you is authentic.

**Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to "Ask Adventure" editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in stamped International Reply Coupons for answer.**

### The Gorilla

YOU hear lots of stories about 'em that just boil down to bunk:

*Question:*—"I am very much interested in gorillas, their habits, habitats, etc.—all possible about them. Seeing your name in *Adventure* for African information I am writing you."—Wm. P. Barron, New York.

*Answer,* by Captain Giddings:—The gorilla is popularly supposed to inhabit the West African territory—Congo to the Cameroon, and eastward to what was formerly German East Africa. There may be an occasional one in this latter territory, though I doubt it. I spent some little time in this region, and though I hunted practically every day I never ran across either the beast or his spoor. We had a native one day come back fearfully to camp, stating he had seen one at the far end of an elephant lane. However, as that particular bearer was known to have a fertile and vivid imagination, coupled with an unholy disregard of the truth, we put little credence in the tale. So, you see, I can give you no first-hand information.

The males run in height from five and one-half to six feet, are very heavily built and possessed of enormous strength. The females are much shorter, averaging about four and one-half feet, though of the same massive build. Not only their height serves to distinguish them from the great baboons, but their small, close-set ears, elongated heads, small thumbs, long arms that reach to the middle of their shinbones in the erect posture, and a groove that runs alongside the nostrils. They are of a blackish-brown, or blackish-gray color.

Being of fierce and morose disposition, gorillas will not live in captivity, so those old African yarns one hears around the camp-fires as to the taming of these beasts by white hunters are merely "bunk." Some months ago I was talking about these huge monkeys to the mate of a Shipping-Board vessel in this port, who had been on the west coast for two years. He stated that although he had hunted faithfully, he had never actually seen a gorilla in the entire two years. Once he had come across spoor, but lost the trail in the jungle. One remark he made stuck in my memory. He said in closing: "They ain't no amiable gorillas. Let me tell you that, cap'n."

I trust this information may be of some little use to you.

### A Young Man's Chance in South America

HERE'S a quick, comprehensive glance over the field:

*Question:*—"My buddy and myself are planning to go to South America, and we want a little information. The reason we want to go is to learn the Spanish language and business methods and customs there. We wish to spend a couple of years in some city which would afford ample opportunities as to education and chance to study the business methods. Here are a few questions we would like to have you answer.

1. What do you think the best place to go?
2. Could we find employment in or near some large city?
3. Are there any American firms where we might be able to find employment?
4. Could you put us in touch with any American firms who are sending men to South America?
5. How are the living-expenses as compared with those in the States?
6. Will it be necessary to procure a passport?
7. What are the leading manufacturing industries?

We are both twenty-three years of age, high-school education, and have good knowledge of French and a very little of Spanish."—MAURICE H. JUDKINS, Elmira, N. Y.

*Answer*, by Dr. Goldsmith:—Some of the most interesting places in South America are not the places where the best Spanish is spoken. In Buenos Aires, the largest and finest city, the worst Spanish is spoken; that is, the language has taken on certain national tendencies in both the use and meaning of words and in pronunciation.

In Montevideo, another very desirable city, the Spanish is a little better, but still it is very much affected by the influence of Portuguese, Italian and Catalán.

Probably the best Spanish spoken in South America is that of Bogotá, in Colombia, but this city is inacessable and you probably could not find there so many opportunities for employment.

The Spanish of Caracas is very good, but Caracas is not so typical of the more highly developed parts of South America, and you would not learn there so much regarding business methods.

1. I think therefore, other things being equal, it might be as well to try Montevideo, Uruguay.

2. You might find employment, but it is not easy to do so without some preparation, trade or profession.

3—4. There are no North American firms that undertake to find employment for those who desire to go to South America. The following firms, however, do business in South America and you might correspond with them.

W. R. Grace & Co., 7 Hanover Square, New York City; Armour & Co., Union Stock Yards, Chicago, Ill.; Armour & Co., 120 Broadway, New York City; Cerro de Pasco Copper Co., 15 Broad Street, New York; U. S. Rubber Export Co., 1790 Broadway, New York City; The National City Bank, 55 Wall Street, New York; First National Bank of Boston, Boston, Mass.; Swift & Co., Union Stock Yards, Chicago, Ill.; Swift & Co., 32 Tenth Ave., New York; Guggenheim Bros., 120 Broadway, New York City; Ulen Contracting Co., 120 Broadway, New York City.

5. Living is pretty expensive in Argentina and Uruguay. It is less so in Brazil, in general, and even less so in Chile.

6. You would have to have passports; for them you should write to the Secretary of State, Washington, D. C., asking for blanks.

7. The leading industries in both Argentina and Uruguay are cattle-raising and agriculture, the preparation and exportation of meats, hides, wool, tallow, etc., and wheat. Much wine is produced in Argentina, and a considerable amount of sugar. Manufactures have not been developed very highly. Portland cement is manufactured near Montevideo, and there are many manufactures intended to supply local demands, such as shoes, woolen goods, etc.

Both French and Spanish would be useful, but if one has had only a school knowledge of these languages he would be somewhat at a loss at first.

**Send question direct to expert in charge—NOT to the magazine.**

### Chronology of the Philippine Insurrection

A FEW dates from a man who helped make 'em historic:

*Question:*—"Could you please give me information on the following questions?

What was the date of the starting and end of the Philippine Insurrection?

What was the date of the battle that was fought in an extinct volcano crater, which was a hard blow to the Moros? I believe it was on the island of Mindanao.

Also if possible what Navy ship had landing-parties that took part in this battle?"—E. J. Brophy, Cristobal, C. Z., Panama.

*Answer*, by Mr. Connor:—The beginning of the Philippine Insurrection was the outcome of Aguinaldo's proclamation, setting himself up as Presidente de Los Islas de Filipinos on June 23rd, 1898.

August 13th, 1898, Manila surrendered to the American forces.

The Insurgent Government met for the first time at Malolos, on September 15th, 1898.

February 4th, 1899, the United States Army began operations against the insurgent forces. This continued throughout the various islands of the archipelego.

March 6th until March 9th, 1906, was the date upon which the battle of Dajo Crater, Sulu Islands, was fought, and in which 1,400 Moros were slain. March 6th—9th, 1906. It was General John J. Pershing—just after he was promoted from captain to bridgadier-general—that cleaned up the Moros and put them into their traces.

It has never come under my observation the exact date of the ending of the insurrection. Yet, in the back part of my mind, I seem to recall July 4th, 1903, as the time President Roosevelt declaring it ended. *This is not authentic.*

It may be well for you to know that I fought through the insurrection from 1899—1903, as well as the Spanish-American War. So I have some recollections of that dim past also.

# LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

KERR, JACK. Uncle. Missing four years. Age forty-one. Believed to have enlisted in the Navy near Philadelphia in 1917. Any information will be appreciated.—Address LAURENCE K. HYDE, 3324 Aldrich Ave., So., Minneapolis, Minn.

TROWBRIDGE, FREDERICK COOKE. Am mighty anxious to hear from you. Get in touch with me through this magazine.—Son, L. C. T.

WILSON, FRANK G. Please write to your wife. I am very unhappy without you.— RS. F. G. WILSON, 230 East 1st St., Tulsa, Okla.

SMELTZER, BONNIE F. Age twenty-three, about six feet two inches tall, 170 pounds, slim, dark hair, small mole on right cheek. Last heard of in Mendota, Cal. February 6th, 1921. Any information will be appreciated.—Address THEODORE. R. SMELTZER, 1226 S. Union St., Traverse City, Mich.

LIPCSEY, ALEX. Last seen in Bridgeport, Conn., seven years ago. Thirty-eight years old, five feet six inches tall, brown hair, blue, eyes, weighs 140 pounds, and is a dancer. Any information will be appreciated.—Address WILLIAM E. BURTON, Washington and Madison Aves., Bridgeport, Conn.

KACZYNSKA, GUS. Last seen in Bridgeport, Conn. Thirty-three years old, five feet six inches tall, weighs about 135 pounds, brown hair, blue eyes, and is a laborer. Any information will be appreciated.—Address WILLIAM E. BURTON, Washington and Madison Aves., Bridgeport, Conn.

SOND, VIOLA. Last heard of in St. Louis, Mo. (2500 North Taylor Avenue.) Black hair, brown eyes and is about five feet four inches tall, weighs about 120 pounds. Any one knowing her whereabouts please write.—MRS. NETTIE RUTLEDGE, 1570 Defer Place, Detroit, Mich.

WILLIAMS, FITZ. Where are you? Hope you are O. K.—Write DARE.

**THE following have been inquired for in either the December 30th or January 10th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:**

APPEL, Milton or Moe; Bluewell, James G.; Boniface, W. J.; Boots, Jon T.; Bracken, Alva L.; Bronson, D. D.; Brune, Frank; Brown, Fred A. and Mary; Clapp, Mrs. Nellie; Dural, Mrs. A.; Edwards, Thomas, Herbert, Laura and Margaret; Fitzpatrick, John F.; Frederickson, Frank R.; Goldie, Joe or John; Haertel, Art; Harper, Walter A.; Henderson, A. F.; Hines, Jack C.; Hogue, Clyde; Kutchinski, Gustave Adolph; Mathias, F.; McCune, Thomas; Moffet, Chauncey; Monk, Fred; Morris, Walter; O'Connor, Daniel; Olie, Pasquale; Olmstead, Lela Jean; Puthee, Leopold; Ravens, Arthur; Rehmann, Mathias; Shultz, Mrs. Frank; Smith, Gordon; Teeter, John Pedro; White, Charles; Williams, George C.

MISCELLANEOUS:—Armed Guard crew on *S. S. Sobral*, 1918; Bennetts; O. W. R.; Shipmates of *S. S. Carlton* and *Farragut*.

**A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.**

# THE TRAIL AHEAD

## JANUARY 30TH ISSUE

**Besides the complete novel and the complete novelette mentioned on the second contents page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:**

**ACCORDING TO THE LAW** — *F. A. M. Webster*
Vengeance in Africa.

**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH** — *John McLoughlin Harvey*
Running the gantlet of the snowslides.

**MEN OF THE NIGHT A Four-Part Story Part III** — *Gordon Young*
Again the masked *Black Wolf* justifies his name.

**YANKEE TRICKS** — *Farnham Bishop*
In the days of privateers.

**THE SILVER FOX** — *Henry W. Patterson*
Crooked work in the snow-country.

**TO MAKE IT SELF-DEFENSE** — *Raymond S. Spears*
Gun-play in the West.

**THE BARRIER** — *Rolf Bennett*
A storm at sea.

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